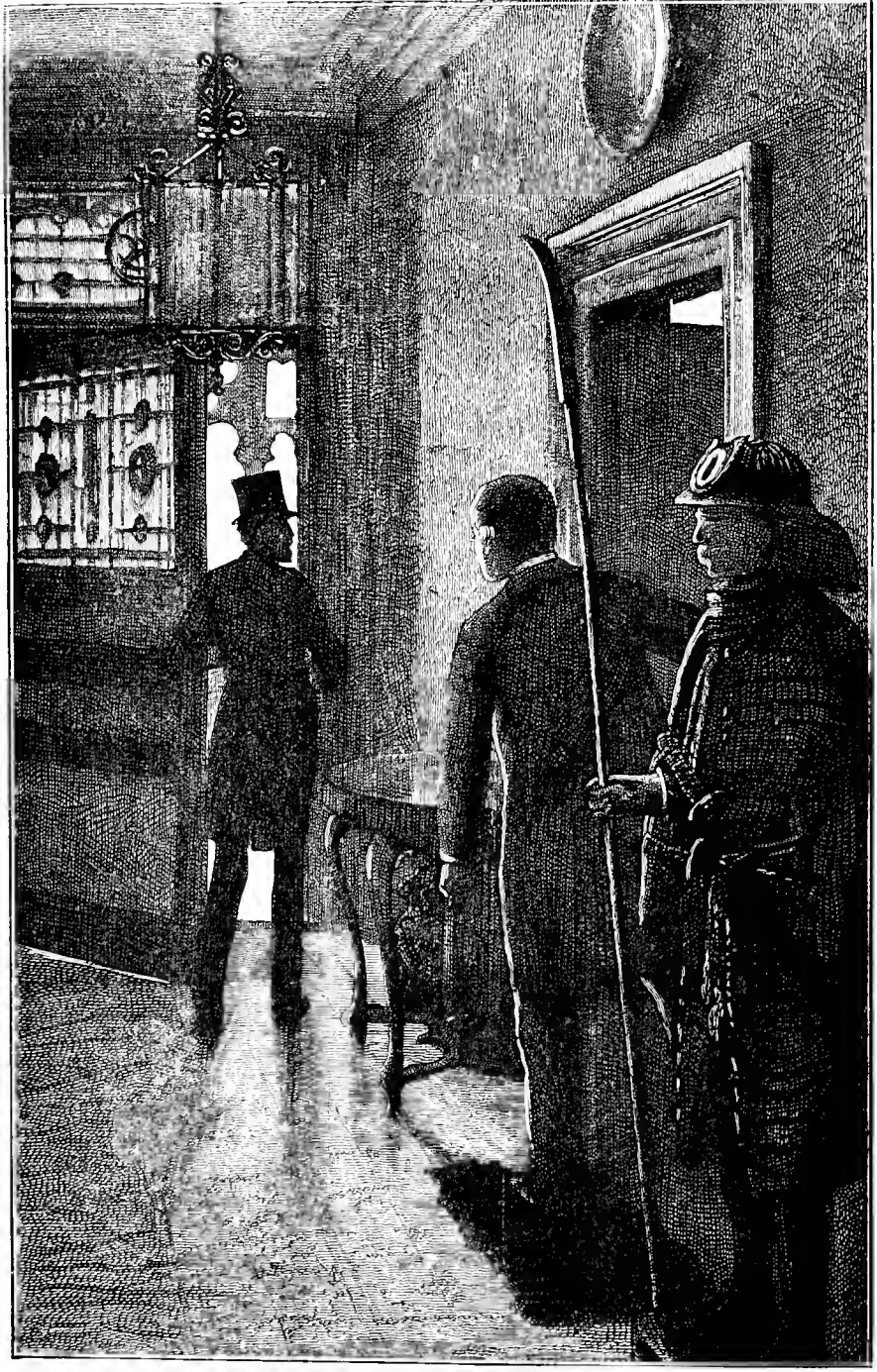

'Does that mean, No?' Mr. Henley called after him.

BLIND LOVE

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

WITH A PREFACE BY WALTER BESANT AND

ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. FORESTIER

IN THREE VOLUMES

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SHE BURST INTO A PASSIONATE FIT OF WEEPING, BROKEN DOWN AT LAST UNDER THE TERRIBLE STRAIN LAID ON HER . . . . . *To face page* 132

BLIND LOVE

CHAPTER XVII

ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

IRIS had only to remember the manner in which she and Mountjoy had disappointed her father, to perceive the serious necessity of preventing Mountjoy's rival from paying a visit at Mr. Henley's house.

She wrote at once to Lord Harry, at the hotel which Mr. Vimpany had mentioned, entreating him not to think of calling on her. Being well aware that he would insist on a meeting, she engaged to write again and propose an appointment. In making this

concession, Iris might have found it easier to persuade herself that she was yielding to sheer necessity, if she had not been guiltily conscious of a feeling of pleasure at the prospect of seeing Lord Harry again, returning to her an innocent man. There was some influence, in this train of thought, which led her mind back to Hugh. She regretted his absence—wondered whether he would have proposed throwing her letter to the Irish lord into the fire—sighed, closed the envelope, and sent the letter to the post.

On the next day she had arranged to drive to Muswell Hill, and to pay the customary visit to Rhoda. Heavy rain obliged her to wait for a fitter opportunity. It was only on the third day that the sky cleared and the weather was favourable again. On a sunshiny autumn morning, with a fine keen air blowing, she ordered the open carriage. Noticing, while Fanny Mere was helping her

to dress, that the girl looked even paler than usual, she said, with her customary kindness to persons dependent on her, 'You look as if a drive in the fresh air would do you good—you shall go with me to the farm, and see Rhoda Bennet.'

When they stopped at the house the farmer's wife appeared, attending a gentleman to the door. Iris at once recognised the local medical man. 'You're not in attendance, I hope, on Rhoda Bennet?' she said.

The doctor acknowledged that there had been some return of the nervous derangement from which the girl suffered. He depended mainly (he said) on the weather allowing her to be out as much as possible in the fresh air, and on keeping her free from all agitation. Rhoda was so far on the way to recovery, that she was now walking in the garden by his advice. He had no fear of her, provided she was not too readily encouraged, in her present

state, to receive visitors. Her mistress would be, of course, an exception to this rule. But even Miss Henley would perhaps do well not to excite the girl by prolonging her visit. There was one other suggestion which he would venture to make, while he had the opportunity. Rhoda was not, as he thought, warmly enough clothed for the time of year; and a bad cold might be easily caught by a person in her condition.

Iris entered the farm-house; leaving Fanny Mere, after what the doctor had said on the subject of visitors, to wait for her in the carriage.

After an absence of barely ten minutes Miss Henley returned; personally changed, not at all to her own advantage, by the introduction of a novelty in her dress. She had gone into the farm-house, wearing a handsome mantle of sealskin. When she came out again, the mantle had vanished, and there appeared

in its place a common cloak of drab-coloured cloth. Noticing the expression of blank amazement in the maid's face, Iris burst out laughing.

'How do you think I look in my new cloak?' she asked.

Fanny saw nothing to laugh at in the sacrifice of a sealskin mantle. 'I must not presume, Miss, to give an opinion,' she said gravely.

'At any rate,' Iris continued, 'you must be more than mortal if my change of costume doesn't excite your curiosity. I found Rhoda Bennet in the garden, exposed to the cold wind in this ugly flimsy thing. After what the doctor had told me, it was high time to assert my authority. I insisted on changing cloaks with Rhoda. She made an attempt, poor dear, to resist; but she knows me of old —and I had my way. I am sorry you have been prevented from seeing her; you shall

not miss the opportunity when she is well again. Do you admire a fine view? Very well; we will vary the drive on our return. Go back,' she said to the coachman, 'by Highgate and Hampstead.'

Fanny's eyes rested on the shabby cloak with a well-founded distrust of it as a protection against the autumn weather. She ventured to suggest that her mistress might feel the loss (in an open carriage) of the warm mantle which she had left on Rhoda's shoulders.

Iris made light of the doubt expressed by her maid. But by the time they had passed Highgate, and had approached the beginning of the straight road which crosses the high ridge of Hampstead Heath, she was obliged to acknowledge that she did indeed feel the cold. 'You ought to be a good walker,' she said, looking at her maid's firm well-knit figure. 'Exercise is all I want to warm me. What do you say to going home on foot?'

Fanny was ready and willing to accompany her mistress. The carriage was dismissed, and they set forth on their walk.

As they passed the inn called 'The Spaniards,' two women who were standing at the garden gate stared at Iris, and smiled. A few paces further on they were met by an errand-boy. He too looked at the young lady, and put his hand derisively to his head, with a shrill whistle expressive of malicious enjoyment. 'I appear to amuse these people,' Iris said. 'What do they see in me?'

Fanny answered with an effort to preserve her gravity, which was not quite successfully disguised: 'I beg your pardon, Miss; I think they notice the curious contrast between your beautiful bonnet and your shabby cloak.'

Persons of excitable temperament have a sense of ridicule, and a dread of it, unintelligible to their fellow-creatures who are made of coarser material. For the moment, Iris

was angry. 'Why didn't you tell me of it,' she asked sharply, 'before I sent away the carriage? How can I walk back, with everybody laughing at me?'

She paused—reflected a little—and led the way off the high road, on the right, to the fine clump of fir trees which commands the famous view in that part of the Heath.

'There's but one thing to be done,' she said, recovering her good temper; 'we must make my grand bonnet suit itself to my miserable cloak. You will pull out the feather and rip off the lace (and keep them for yourself, if you like), and then I ought to look shabby enough from head to foot, I am sure! No; not here; they may notice us from the road—and what may the fools not do when they see you tearing the ornaments off my bonnet! Come down below the trees where the ground will hide us.'

They had nearly descended the steep slope

which leads to the valley, below the clump of firs, when they were stopped by a terrible discovery.

Close at their feet, in a hollow of the ground, was stretched the insensible body of a man. He lay, on his side, with his face turned away from them. An open razor had dropped close by him. Iris stooped over the prostrate man, to examine his face. Blood flowing from a frightful wound in his throat was the first thing that she saw. Her eyes closed instinctively, recoiling from that ghastly sight. The next instant she opened them again, and saw his face.

Dying, or dead, it was the face of Lord Harry.

The shriek that burst from her, on making that horrible discovery, was heard by two men who were crossing the Lower Heath at some distance. They saw the women and ran to them. One of the men was a labourer:

the other, better dressed, looked like a foreman of works. He was the first who arrived on the spot.

'Enough to frighten you out of your senses, ladies,' he said civilly. 'It's a case of suicide, I should say, by the look of it.'

'For God's sake, let us do something to help him!' Iris burst out. 'I know him; I know him!'

Fanny, equal to the emergency, asked Miss Henley for her handkerchief, joined her own handkerchief to it, and began to bandage the wound. 'Try if his pulse is beating,' she said quietly to her mistress. The foreman made himself useful by examining the suicide's pockets. Iris thought she could detect a faint fluttering in the pulse. 'Is there no doctor living near?' she cried. 'Is there no carriage to be found in this horrible place?'

The foreman had discovered two letters. Iris read her own name on one of them. The

other was addressed 'To the person who may find my body.' She tore the envelope open. It contained one of Mr. Vimpany's cards, with these desperate words written on it in pencil: 'Take me to the doctor's address, and let him bury me or dissect me, whichever he pleases.' Iris showed the card to the foreman. 'Is it near here?' she asked. 'Yes, Miss; we might get him to that place in no time, if there was a conveyance of any kind to be found.' Still preserving her presence of mind, Fanny pointed in the direction of 'The Spaniards' inn. 'We might get what we want there,' she said. 'Shall I go?'

Iris signed to her to attend to the wounded man, and ascended the sloping ground. She ran on towards the road. The men, directed by Fanny, raised the body and slowly followed her, diverging to an easier ascent. As Iris reached the road a four-wheel cab passed her. Without an instant's hesitation she called to

the driver to stop. He pulled up his horse. She confronted a solitary gentleman, staring out of the window of the cab, and looking as if he thought that a lady had taken a liberty with him. Iris allowed the outraged stranger no opportunity of expressing his sentiments. Breathless as she was, she spoke first.

'Pray forgive me—you are alone in the cab—there is room for a gentleman, dangerously wounded—he will bleed to death if we don't find help for him—the place is close by—oh, don't refuse me!' She looked back holding fast by the cab door, and saw Fanny and the men slowly approaching. 'Bring him here!' she cried.

'Do nothing of the sort!' shouted the gentleman in possession of the cab.

But Fanny obeyed her mistress; and the men obeyed Fanny. Iris turned indignantly to the merciless stranger. 'I ask you to do

an act of Christian kindness,' she said. 'How can you, how dare you, hesitate?'

'Drive on!' cried the stranger.

'Drive on, at your peril,' Iris added, on her side.

The cabman sat, silent and stolid, on the box, waiting for events.

Slowly the men came in view, bearing Lord Harry, still insensible. The handkerchiefs on his throat were saturated with blood. At that sight the cowardly instincts of the stranger completely mastered him. 'Let me out!' he clamoured; 'let me out!'

Finding the cab left at her disposal, Iris actually thanked him! He looked at her with an evil eye. 'I have my suspicions, I can tell you,' he muttered. 'If this comes to a trial in a court of law, I'm not going to be mixed up with it. Innocent people have been hanged before now, when appearances were against them.'

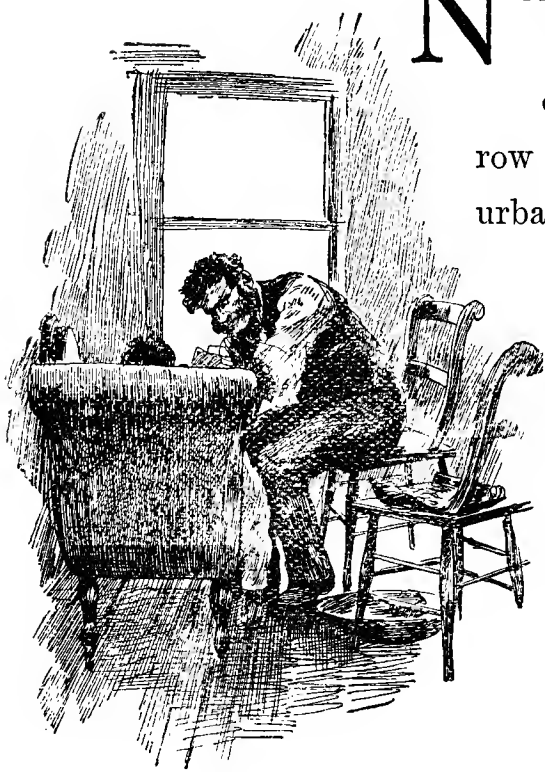
He walked off, and, by way of completing the revelation of his own meanness, forgot to pay his fare.

On the point of starting the horse to pursue him, the cabman was effectually stopped. Iris showed him a sovereign. Upon this hint (like Othello) he spoke.

'All right, Miss. I see your poor gentleman is a-bleeding. You'll take care—won't you?—that he doesn't spoil my cushions.' The driver was not an ill-conditioned man; he put the case of his property indulgently, with a persuasive smile. Iris turned to the two worthy fellows, who had so readily given her their help, and bade them good-bye, with a solid expression of her gratitude which they both remembered for many a long day to come. Fanny was already in the cab supporting Lord Harry's body. Iris joined her. The cabman drove carefully to Mr. Vimpany's new house.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE



NUMBER Five was near the centre of the row of little suburban houses, called Redburn Road. When the cab drew up at the door Mr. Vimpany himself was visible,

looking out of the window on the ground floor—and yawning as he looked. Iris beckoned to him impatiently. 'Anything wrong?' he asked, as he approached the door of the cab. She drew back, and silently showed him what was wrong. The doctor received the shock with composure. When he happened to be sober and sad, looking for patients and failing to find them, Mr. Vimpany's capacity for feeling sympathy began and ended with himself.

'This is a new scrape, even for Lord Harry,' he remarked. 'Let's get him into the house.'

The insensible man was carried into the nearest room on the ground floor. Pale and trembling, Iris related what had happened, and asked if there was no hope of saving him.

'Patience!' Mr. Vimpany answered; 'I'll tell you directly.'

He removed the bandages, and examined

the wound. 'There's been a deal of blood lost,' he said; 'I'll try and pull him through. While I am about it, Miss, go upstairs, if you please, and find your way to the drawing-room.' Iris hesitated. The doctor opened a neat mahogany box. 'The tools of my trade,' he continued; 'I'm going to sew up his lordship's throat.' Shuddering as she heard those words, Iris hurried out of the room. Fanny followed her mistress up the stairs. In her own very different way, the maid was as impenetrably composed as Mr. Vimpany himself. 'There was a second letter found in the gentleman's pocket, Miss,' she said. 'Will you excuse my reminding you that you have not read it yet.'

Iris read the lines that follow:

'Forgive me, my dear, for the last time. My letter is to say that I shall trouble you no more in this world—and, as for the other world, who knows? I brought some money

back with me from the gold-fields. It was not enough to be called a fortune—I mean the sort of fortune which might persuade your father to let you marry me. Well! here in England I had an opportunity of making ten times more of it on the turf; and, let me add, with private information of the horses which I might certainly count on to win. I don't stop to ask by what cruel roguery I was tempted to my ruin. My money is lost; and, with it, my last hope of a happy and harmless life with you comes to an end. I die, Iris dear, with the death of that hope. Something in me seems to shrink from suicide in the ugly gloom of great overgrown London. I prefer to make away with myself among the fields, where the green will remind me of dear old Ireland. When you think of me sometimes, say to yourself the poor wretch loved me—and perhaps the earth will lie lighter on Harry for those kind words, and the flowers (if you

favour me by planting a few) may grow prettier on my grave.'

There it ended.

The heart of Iris sank as she read that melancholy farewell, expressed in language at once wild and childish. If he survived his desperate attempt at self-destruction, to what end would it lead? In silence, the woman who loved him put his letter back in her bosom. Watching her attentively—affected, it was impossible to say how, by that mute distress—Fanny Mere proposed to go downstairs, and ask once more what hope there might be for the wounded man. Iris knew the doctor too well to let the maid leave her on a useless errand.

'Some men might be kindly ready to relieve my suspense,' she said; 'the man downstairs is not one of them. I must wait till he comes to me, or sends for me. But there is something I wish to say to you, while we are alone.

You have been but a short time in my service, Fanny. Is it too soon to ask if you feel some interest in me?'

'If I can comfort you or help you, Miss, be pleased to tell me how.' She made that reply respectfully, in her usual quiet manner; her pale cheeks showing no change of colour, her faint blue eyes resting steadily on her mistress's face. Iris went on:

'If I ask you to keep what has happened, on this dreadful day, a secret from everybody, may I trust you—little as you know of me—as I might have trusted Rhoda Bennet?'

'I promise it, Miss.' In saying those few words, the undemonstrative woman seemed to think that she had said enough.

Iris had no alternative but to ask another favour.

'And whatever curiosity you may feel, will you be content to do me a kindness—without wanting an explanation?'

'It is my duty to respect my mistress's secrets; I will do my duty.' No sentiment, no offer of respectful sympathy; a positive declaration of fidelity, left impenetrably to speak for itself. Was the girl's heart hardened by the disaster which had darkened her life? Or was she the submissive victim of that inbred reserve which shrinks from the frank expression of feeling, and lives and dies self-imprisoned in its own secrecy? A third explanation, founded probably on a steadier basis, was suggested by Miss Henley's remembrance of their first interview. Fanny's nature had revealed a sensitive side, when she was first encouraged to hope for a refuge from ruin followed perhaps by starvation and death. Judging so far from experience, a sound conclusion seemed to follow. When circumstances strongly excited the girl, there was a dormant vitality in her that revived. At other times, when events failed to agitate her by a

direct appeal to personal interests, her constitutional reserve held the rule. She could be impenetrably honest, steadily industrious, truly grateful—but the intuitive expression of feeling, on ordinary occasions, was beyond her reach.

After an interval of nearly half an hour, Mr. Vimpany made his appearance. Pausing in the doorway, he consulted his watch, and entered on a calculation which presented him favourably from a professional point of view.

'Allow for time lost in reviving my lord when he fainted, and stringing him up with a drop of brandy, and washing my hands (look how clean they are!), I haven't been more than twenty minutes in mending his throat. Not bad surgery, Miss Henley.'

'Is his life safe, Mr. Vimpany?'

'Thanks to his luck—yes.'

'His luck?'

'To be sure! In the first place, he owes

his life to your finding him when you did; a little later, and it would have been all over with Lord Harry. Second piece of luck: catching the doctor at home, just when he was most wanted. Third piece of luck: our friend didn't know how to cut his own throat properly. You needn't look black at me, Miss; I'm not joking. A suicide with a razor in his hand has generally one chance in his favour—he is ignorant of anatomy. That is my lord's case. He has only cut through the upper fleshy part of his throat, and has missed the larger blood-vessels. Take my word for it, he will do well enough now; thanks to you, thanks to me, and thanks to his own ignorance. What do you say to that way of putting it? Ha! my brains are in good working order to-day; I havn't been drinking any of Mr. Mountjoy's claret—do you take the joke, Miss Henley?'

Chuckling over the recollection of his own

drunken audacity, he happened to notice Fanny Mere.

'Hullo! is this another injured person in want of me? You're as white as a sheet, Miss. If you're going to faint, do me a favour—wait till I can get the brandy bottle. Oh! it's natural to you, is it? I see. A thick skin and a slow circulation; you will live to be an old woman. A friend of yours, Miss Henley?'

Fanny answered composedly for herself: 'I am Miss Henley's maid, sir.'

'What's become of the other one?' Mr. Vimpany asked. 'Aye? aye? Staying at a farm-house for the benefit of her health, is she? If I had been allowed time enough, I would have made a cure of Rhoda Bennet. There isn't a medical man in England who knows more than I do of the nervous maladies of women—and what is my reward? Is my waiting-room crammed with rich people

coming to consult me? Do I live in a fashionable Square? Have I even been made a Baronet? Damn it—I beg your pardon, Miss Henley—but it *is* irritating, to a man of my capacity, to be completely neglected. For the last three days not a creature has darkened the doors of this house. Could I say a word to you?'

He led Iris mysteriously into a corner of the room. 'About our friend downstairs?' he began.

'When may we hope that he will be well again, Mr. Vimpany?'

'Maybe in three weeks. In a month at most. I have nobody here but a stupid servant-girl. We ought to have a competent nurse. I can get a thoroughly trained person from the hospital; but there's a little difficulty. I am an outspoken man. When I am poor, I own I am poor. My lord must be well fed; the nurse must be well fed. Would

you mind advancing a small loan, to provide beforehand for the payment of expenses?'

Iris handed her purse to him, sick of the sight of Mr. Vimpany. 'Is that all?' she asked, making for the door.

'Much obliged. That's all.'

As they approached the room on the ground floor, Iris stopped: her eyes rested on the doctor. Even to that coarse creature, the eloquent look spoke for her. Fanny noticed it and suddenly turned her head aside. Over the maid's white face there passed darkly an expression of unutterable contempt. Her mistress's weakness had revealed itself—weakness for one of the betrayers of women: weakness for a man! In the meantime, Mr. Vimpany (having got the money) was ready to humour the enviable young lady with a well-filled purse.

'Do you want to see my lord before you go?' he asked, amused at the idea. 'Mind!

you mustn't disturb him! No talking, and no crying. Ready? Now look at him.'

There he lay, on a shabby little sofa in an ugly little room; his eyes closed; one helpless hand hanging down; a stillness on his ghastly face horribly suggestive of the stillness of death—there he lay, the reckless victim of his love for the woman who had desperately renounced him again and again, who had now saved him for the third time. Ah, how her treacherous heart pleaded for him! Can you drive him away from you after this? You, who love him, what does your cold-blooded prudence say, when you look at him now?

She felt herself drawn, roughly and suddenly, back into the passage. The door was closed; the doctor was whispering to her. 'Hold up, Miss! I expected better things of you. Come! come!—no fainting. You'll find him a different man to-morrow. Pay us a visit, and judge for yourself.'

After what she had suffered, Iris hungered for sympathy. 'Isn't it pitiable?' she said to her maid as they left the house.

'I don't know, Miss.'

'You don't know? Good Heavens, are you made of stone. Have you no such thing as a heart in you?'

'Not for the men,' Fanny answered. 'I keep my pity for the women.'

Iris knew what bitter remembrances made their confession in those words. How she missed Rhoda Bennet at that moment!

CHAPTER XIX

MR. HENLEY AT HOME

FOR a month, Mountjoy remained in his cottage on the shores of the Solway Firth, superintending the repairs.

His correspondence with Iris was regularly continued; and, for the first time in his experience of her was a cause of disappointment to him.

Her replies revealed an incomprehensible change in her manner of writing, which became more and more marked in each succeeding instance. Notice it as he might in his own letters, no explanation followed on the part of his correspondent. She, who had

so frankly confided her joys and sorrows to him in past days, now wrote with a reserve which seemed only to permit the most vague and guarded allusion to herself. The changes in the weather; the alternation of public news that was dull, and public news that was interesting; the absence of her father abroad, occasioned by doubt of the soundness of his investments in foreign securities; vague questions relating to Hugh's new place of abode, which could only have proceeded from a preoccupied mind—these were the topics on which Iris dwelt, in writing to her faithful old friend. It was hardly possible to doubt that something must have happened, which she had reasons—serious reasons, as it seemed only too natural to infer—for keeping concealed from Mountjoy. Try as he might to disguise it from himself, he now knew how dear, how hopelessly dear, she was to him by the anxiety that he suffered, and by the

jealous sense of injury which defied his self-command. His immediate superintendence of the workmen at the cottage was no longer necessary. Leaving there a representative whom he could trust, he resolved to answer his last letter, received from Iris, in person.

The next day he was in London.

Calling at the house, he was informed that Miss Henley was not at home, and that it was impossible to say with certainty when she might return. While he was addressing his inquiries to the servant, Mr. Henley opened the library-door. 'Is that you, Mountjoy?' he asked. 'Come in; I want to speak to you.'

Short and thick-set, with a thin-lipped mouth, a coarsely-florid complexion, and furtive greenish eyes; hard in his manner and harsh in his voice; Mr. Henley was one of the few heartless men, who are innocent of deception on the surface: he was externally

a person who inspired, at first sight, feelings of doubt and dislike. His manner failed to show even a pretence of being glad to see Hugh. What he had to say, he said walking up and down the room, and scratching his bristly iron-gray hair from time to time. These signs of restlessness indicated, to those who knew him well, that he had a selfish use to make of a fellow-creature, and failed to see immediately how to reach the end in view.

'I say, Mountjoy,' he began, 'have you any idea of what my daughter is about?'

'I don't even understand what you mean,' Hugh replied. 'For the last month I have been in Scotland.'

'You and she write to each other, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'Hasn't she told you——'

'Excuse me for interrupting you, Mr. Henley; she has told me nothing.'

Mr. Henley stared absently at the superbly-bound books on his library-shelves (never degraded by the familiar act of reading), and scratched his head more restlessly than ever.

'Look here, young man. When you were staying with me in the country, I rather hoped it might end in a marriage-engagement. You and Iris disappointed me—not for the first time. But women do change their minds. Suppose she had changed *her* mind, after having twice refused you? Suppose she had given you an opportunity——'

Hugh interrupted him again. 'It's needless to suppose anything of the sort, sir; she would *not* have given me an opportunity.'

'Don't fence with me, Mountjoy! I'll put it in a milder way, if you prefer being humbugged. Do you feel any interest in that perverse girl of mine?'

Hugh answered readily and warmly: 'The truest interest!'

Even Mr. Henley was human; his ugly face looked uglier still. It assumed the self-satisfied expression of a man who had carried his point.

'Now I can go on, my friend, with what I had to say to you. I have been abroad on business, and only came back the other day. The moment I saw Iris I noticed something wrong about her. If I had been a stranger, I should have said: That young woman is not easy in her mind. Perfectly useless to speak to her about it. Quite happy and quite well —there was her own account of herself. I tried her maid next, a white-livered sulky creature, one of the steadiest liars I have ever met with. "I know of nothing amiss with my mistress, sir." There was the maid's way of keeping the secret, whatever it may be. I don't know whether you may have noticed it, in the course of your acquaintance with me— I hate to be beaten.'

'No, Mr. Henley, I have not noticed it.'

'Then you are informed of it now. Have you seen my housekeeper?'

'Once or twice, sir.'

'Come! you're improving; we shall make something of you in course of time. Well, the housekeeper was the next person I spoke to about my daughter. Had she seen anything strange in Miss Iris, while I was away from home? There's a dash of malice in my housekeeper's composition; I don't object to a dash of malice. When the old woman is pleased, she shows her yellow fangs. She *had* something to tell me: "The servants, have been talking, sir, about Miss Iris." "Out with it, ma'am! what do they say?" "They notice, sir, that their young lady has taken to going out in the forenoon regularly every day; always by herself, and always in the same direction. I don't encourage the servants, Mr. Henley; there was something insolent in the tone of suspicion that they

adopted. I told them that Miss Iris was merely taking her walk. They reminded me that it must be a cruelly long walk; Miss Iris being away regularly for four or five hours together, before she came back to the house. After that" (says the housekeeper), "I thought it best to drop the subject." What do you think of it yourself, Mountjoy? Do you call my daughter's conduct suspicious?'

'I see nothing suspicious, Mr. Henley. When Iris goes out, she visits a friend.'

'And always goes in the same direction, and always visits the same friend,' Mr. Henley added. 'I felt a curiosity to know who that friend might be; and I made the discovery yesterday. When you were staying in my house in the country, do you remember the man who waited on you?'

Mountjoy began to feel alarmed for Iris; he answered as briefly as possible.

'Your valet,' he said.

'That's it! Well, I took my valet into my confidence—not for the first time, I can tell you: an invaluable fellow. When Iris went out yesterday, he tracked her to a wretched little suburban place near Hampstead Heath, called Redburn Road. She rang the bell at Number Five, and was at once let in—evidently well known there. My clever man made inquiries in the neighbourhood. The house belongs to a doctor who has lately taken it. Name of Vimpany.'

Mountjoy was not only startled but showed it plainly. Mr. Henley, still pacing backwards and forwards, happened by good fortune to have his back turned towards his visitor at that moment.

'Now I ask you as a man of the world,' Mr. Henley resumed, 'what does this mean? If you're too cautious to speak out—and I must say it looks like it—shall I set you the example?'

'Just as you please, sir.'

'Very well, then; I'll tell you what I suspect. When Iris is at home, and when there's something amiss in my family, I believe that scoundrel Lord Harry to be at the bottom of it. There's my experience, and there's my explanation. I was on the point of ordering my carriage, to go to the doctor myself, and insist on knowing what the attraction is that takes my daughter to his house, when I heard your voice in the hall. You tell me you are interested in Iris. Very well; you are just the man to help me.'

'May I ask how, Mr. Henley?'

'Of course you may. You can find your way to her confidence, if you choose to try; she will trust you, when she won't trust her father. I don't care two straws about her other secrets; but I do want to know whether she is, or is not, plotting to marry the Irish blackguard. Satisfy me about that, and you

needn't tell me anything more. May I count on you to find out how the land lies?'

Mountjoy listened, hardly able to credit the evidence of his own senses: he was actually expected to insinuate himself into the confidence of Iris, and then to betray her to her father! He rose, and took his hat—and, without even the formality of a bow, opened the door.

'Does that mean No?' Mr. Henley called after him.

'Most assuredly,' Mountjoy answered—and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XX

FIRST SUSPICIONS OF IRIS

FROM the last memorable day on which Iris had declared to him that he might always count on her as his friend, but never as his wife, Hugh had resolved to subject his feelings to a rigorous control. As to conquering his hopeless love, he knew but too well that it would conquer him, on any future occasion when he and Iris happened to meet.

He had been true to his resolution, at what cost of suffering he, and he alone, knew. Sincerely, unaffectedly, he had tried to remain her friend. But the nature of the truest and the firmest man has its weak place, where the

subtle influence of a woman is concerned. Deeply latent, beyond the reach of his own power of sounding, there was jealousy of the Irish lord lurking in Mountjoy, and secretly leading his mind when he hesitated in those emergencies of his life which were connected with Iris. Ignorant of the influence which was really directing him, he viewed with contempt Mr. Henley's suspicions of a secret understanding between his daughter and the man who was, by her own acknowledgment, unworthy of the love with which it had been her misfortune to regard him. At the same time, Hugh's mind was reluctantly in search of an explanation, which might account (without degrading Iris) for her having been traced to the doctor's house. In his recollection of events at the old country town, he found a motive for her renewal of intercourse with such a man as Mr. Vimpany, in the compassionate feeling with which she regarded the

doctor's unhappy wife. There might well be some humiliating circumstance, recently added to the other trials of Mrs. Vimpany's married life, which had appealed to all that was generous and forgiving in the nature of Iris. Knowing nothing of the resolution to live apart which had latterly separated the doctor and his wife, Mountjoy decided on putting his idea to the test by applying for information to Mrs. Vimpany at her husband's house.

In the nature of a sensitive man the bare idea of delay, under these circumstances, was unendurable. Hugh called the first cab that passed him, and drove to Hampstead.

Careful—morbidly careful, perhaps—not to attract attention needlessly to himself, he stopped the cab at the entrance to Redburn Road, and approached Number Five on foot. A servant-girl answered the door. Mountjoy asked if Mrs. Vimpany was at home.

The girl made no immediate reply. She

seemed to be puzzled by Mountjoy's simple question. Her familiar manner, with its vulgar assumption of equality in the presence of a stranger, revealed the London-bred maid-servant of modern times. 'Did you say *Mrs.* Vimpany?' she inquired sharply.

'Yes.'

'There's no such person here.'

It was Mountjoy's turn to be puzzled. 'Is this Mr. Vimpany's house?' he said.

'Yes, to be sure it is.'

'And yet Mrs. Vimpany doesn't live here?'

'No Mrs. Vimpany has darkened these doors,' the girl declared positively.

'Are you sure you are not making a mistake?'

'Quite sure. I have been in the doctor's service since he first took the house.'

Determined to solve the mystery, if it could be done, Mountjoy asked if he could

see the doctor. No: Mr. Vimpany had gone out.

'There's a young person comes to us,' the servant continued. 'I wonder whether you mean her, when you ask for Mrs. Vimpany? The name *she* gives is Henley.'

'Is Miss Henley here, now?'

'You can't see her—she's engaged.'

She was not engaged with Mrs. Vimpany, for no such person was known in the house. She was not engaged with the doctor, for the doctor had gone out. Mountjoy looked at the hat-stand in the passage, and discovered a man's hat and a man's greatcoat. To whom did they belong? Certainly not to Mr. Vimpany, who had gone out. Repellent as it was, Mr. Henley's idea that the explanation of his daughter's conduct was to be found in the renewed influence over her of the Irish lord, now presented itself to Hugh's mind under a new point of view. He tried in vain to resist

the impression that had been produced on him. A sense of injury, which he was unable to justify to himself, took possession of him. Come what might of it, he determined to set at rest the doubts of which he was ashamed, by communicating with Iris. His card-case proved to be empty when he opened it; but there were letters in his pocket addressed to him at his hotel in London. Removing the envelope from one of these, he handed it to the servant:

'Take that to Miss Henley, and ask when I can see her.'

The girl left him in the passage, and went upstairs to the drawing-room.

In the flimsily-built little house, he could hear the heavy step of a man, crossing the room above, and then the resonant tones of a man's voice raised as if in anger. Had she given him already the right to be angry with her? He thought of the time when the betrayal of

Lord Harry's vindictive purpose in leaving England had frightened her—when he had set aside his own sense of what was due to him, for her sake—and had helped her to communicate, by letter, with the man whose fatal ascendency over Iris had saddened his life. Was what he heard, now, the return that he had deserved?

After a short absence, the servant came back with a message.

'Miss Henley begs you will excuse her. She will write to you.'

Would this promised letter be like the other letters which he had received from her in Scotland? Mountjoy's gentler nature reminded him that he owed it to his remembrance of happier days, and truer friendship, to wait and see.

He was just getting into the cab, on his return to London, when a closed carriage, with one person in it, passed him on its way

to Redburn Road. In that person he recognised Mr. Henley. As the cab-driver mounted to his seat, Hugh saw the carriage stop at Number Five.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PARTING SCENE

THE evening had advanced, and the candles had just been lit in Mountjoy's sitting-room at the hotel.

His anxiety to hear from Iris had been doubled and trebled, since he had made the discovery of her father's visit to the doctor's house, at a time when it was impossible to doubt

that Lord Harry was with her. Hugh's jealous sense of wrong was now mastered by the nobler emotions which filled him with pity and alarm, when he thought of Iris placed between the contending claims of two such men as the heartless Mr. Henley and the reckless Irish lord. He had remained at the hotel, through the long afternoon, on the chance that she might write to him speedily by the hand of a messenger—and no letter had arrived. He was still in expectation of news which might reach him by the evening post, when the waiter knocked at the door.

'A letter?' Mountjoy asked.

'No, sir,' the man answered; 'a lady.'

Before she could raise her veil, Hugh had recognised Iris. Her manner was subdued; her face was haggard; her hand lay cold and passive in his hand, when he advanced to bid her welcome. He placed a chair for her by the fire. She thanked him, and declined to

take it. With the air of a woman conscious of committing an intrusion, she seated herself apart in a corner of the room.

'I have tried to write to you, and I have not been able to do it.' She said that, with a dogged resignation of tone and manner, so unlike herself that Mountjoy looked at her in dismay. 'My friend,' she went on, 'your pity is all I may hope for; I am no longer worthy of the interest you once felt in me.'

Hugh saw that it would be useless to remonstrate. He asked if it had been his misfortune to offend her.

'No,' she said, 'you have not offended me.'

'Then what in Heaven's name does this change in you mean?'

'It means,' she said, as coldly as ever, 'that I have lost my self-respect; it means that my father has renounced me, and that you will do well to follow his example. Have

I not led you to believe that I could never be the wife of Lord Harry? Well! I have deceived you—I am going to marry him.'

'I can't believe it, Iris! I won't believe it!'

She handed him the letter, in which the Irishman had declared his resolution to destroy himself. Hugh read it with contempt. 'Did my lord's heart fail him?' he asked scornfully.

'He would have died by his own hand, Mr. Mountjoy——'

'Oh, Iris—"*Mr.!*"'

'I will say "Hugh," if you prefer it—but the days of our familiar friendship are none the less at an end. I found Lord Harry bleeding to death from a wound in his throat. It was in a lonely place on Hampstead Heath; I was the one person who happened to pass by it. For the third time, you see, it has been my destiny to save him. How can I

forget that? My mind will dwell on it. I try to find happiness—oh, only happiness enough for *me*—in cheering my poor Irishman, on his way back to the life that I have preserved. There is my motive, if I have a motive. Day after day, I have helped to nurse him. Day after day, I have heard him say things to me—what is the use of repeating them? After years of resistance, I have given way; let that be enough. My one act of discretion has been to prevent a quarrel between my father and Harry. I beg your pardon, I ought to have said Lord Harry. When my father came to the house, I insisted on speaking with him alone; I told him what I have just told you. He said: "Think again before you make your choice between that man and me. If you decide to marry him, you will live and die without one farthing of my money to help you." He put his watch on the table between us, and gave me five

minutes to make up my mind. It was a long five minutes, but it ended at last. He asked me which he was to do—leave his will as it was, or go to his lawyer and make another? I said, "You will do as you please, sir." No; it was not a hasty reply—you can't make that excuse for me. I knew what I was saying; and I saw the future I was preparing for myself, as plainly as you see it——'

Hugh could endure no longer the reckless expression of her despair.

'No!' he cried, 'you don't see your future as I see it. Will you hear what I have to say, before it is too late?'

'It is too late already. But I will listen to you if you wish it.'

'And, while you listen,' Mountjoy added, 'you will acquit me of being influenced by a selfish motive. I have loved you dearly. Perhaps, in secret, I love you still. But this I know: if you were to remain a single woman

for the rest of your life, there would be no hope for Me. Do you believe that I am speaking the truth?'

'You always speak the truth.'

'I speak in your interests, at least. You think you see your future life plainly—you are blind to your future life. You talk as if you were resigned to suffer. Are you resigned to lose your sense of right and wrong? Are you resigned to lead the life of an outlaw, and—worse still—not to feel the disgrace of it?'

'Go on, Hugh.'

'You won't answer me?'

'I won't shock you.'

'You don't discourage me, my dear; I am still obstinate in the hope of restoring you to your calmer and truer self. Let me do every justice to Lord Harry. I believe, sincerely believe, that his miserable life has not utterly destroyed in him the virtues which

distinguish an honourable man. But he has one terrible defect. In his nature, there is the fatal pliability which finds companionable qualities in bad friends. In this aspect of his character, he is a dangerous man—and he may be (forgive me!) a bad husband. It is a thankless task to warn you to any good purpose. A wife—and a loving wife more than another—feels the deteriorating influence of a husband who is not worthy of her. His ways of thinking are apt to become, little by little, her ways of thinking. She makes allowances for him which he does not deserve; her sense of right and wrong becomes confused; and, before she is aware of it herself, she has sunk to his level. Are you angry with me?'

'How can I be angry with you? Perhaps you are right.'

'Do you really mean that?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Then, for God's sake, reconsider your decision! Let me go to your father.'

'Mere waste of time,' Iris answered. 'Nothing that you can say will have the least effect on him.'

'At any rate,' Mountjoy persisted, 'I mean to try.'

Had he touched her? She smiled—how bitterly, Hugh failed to perceive.

'Shall I tell you what happened to me when I went home to-day?' she said. 'I found my maid waiting in the hall—with everything that belongs to me, packed up for my departure. The girl explained that she had been forced to obey my father's positive orders. I knew what that meant—I had to leave the house, and find a place to live in.'

'Not by yourself, Iris?'

'No—with my maid. She is a strange creature; if she feels sympathy, she never expresses it. "I am your grateful servant,

Miss. Where you go, I go." That was all she said; I was not disappointed—I am getting used to Fanny Mere already. Mine is a lonely lot—isn't it? I have acquaintances among the few ladies who sometimes visit at my father's house, but no friends. My mother's family, as I have always been told, cast her off when she married a man in trade, with a doubtful reputation. I don't even know where my relations live. Isn't Lord Harry good enough for me, as I am now? When I look at my prospects, is it wonderful if I talk like a desperate woman? There is but one encouraging circumstance that I can see. This misplaced love of mine that everybody condemns has, oddly enough, a virtue that everybody must admire. It offers a refuge to a woman who is alone in the world.'

Mountjoy denied indignantly that she was alone in the world.

'Is there any protection that a man can offer to a woman,' he asked, 'which I am not ready and eager to offer to You? Oh, Iris, what have I done to deserve that you should speak of yourself as friendless in my hearing?'

He had touched her at last. Their tender charm showed itself once more in her eyes and in her smile. She rose and approached him.

'What exquisite kindness it must be,' she said, 'that blinds a clever man like you to obstacles which anyone else can see! Remember, dear Hugh, what the world would say to that protection which your true heart offers to me. Are you my near relation? are you my guardian? are you even an old man? Ah me! you are only an angel of goodness whom I must submit to lose. I shall still count on your kindness when we see each other no more. You will pity me, when you hear that I have fallen lower and lower; you

will be sorry for me, when I end in disgracing myself.'

'Even then, Iris, we shall not be separated. The loving friend who is near you now, will be your loving friend still.'

For the first time in her life, she threw her arms round him. In the agony of that farewell, she held him to her bosom. 'Good-bye, dear,' she said faintly—and kissed him.

The next moment, a deadly pallor overspread her face. She staggered as she drew back, and dropped into the chair that she had just left. In the fear that she might faint, Mountjoy hurried out in search of a restorative. His bed-chamber was close by, at the end of the corridor; and there were smelling-salts in his dressing-case. As he raised the lid, he heard the door behind him, the one door in the room, locked from the outer side.

He rushed to the door, and called to her. From the farther end of the corridor, her

voice reached him for the last time, repeating the last melancholy word: 'Good-bye.' No renewal of the miserable parting scene; no more of the heartache—Iris had ended it!

CHAPTER XXII

THE FATAL WORDS

WHEN Mountjoy had rung for the servant, and the bedroom door had been unlocked, it was too late to follow the fugitive. Her cab was waiting for her outside; and the attention of the porter had been distracted, at the same time, by a new arrival of travellers at the hotel.

It is more or less in the nature of all men who are worthy of the name, to take refuge from distress in action. Hugh decided on writing to Iris, and on making his appeal to her father, that evening. He abstained from alluding, in his letter, to the manner in which she had left him; it was her right, it was even

her duty, to spare herself. All that he asked was to be informed of her present place of residence, so that he might communicate the result—in writing only if she preferred it—of his contemplated interview with her father. He addressed his letter to the care of Mr. Vimpany, to be forwarded, and posted it himself.

This done, he went on at once to Mr. Henley's house.

The servant who opened the door had evidently received his orders. Mr. Henley was 'not at home.' Mountjoy was in no humour to be trifled with. He pushed the man out of his way, and made straight for the dining-room. There, as his previous experience of the habits of the household had led him to anticipate, was the man whom he was determined to see. The table was laid for Mr. Henley's late dinner.

Hugh's well-meant attempt to plead the

daughter's cause with the father, ended as Iris had said it would end.

After hotly resenting the intrusion on him that had been committed, Mr. Henley declared that a codicil to his will, depriving his daughter absolutely of all interest in his property, had been legally executed that day. For a time, Mountjoy's self-control had resisted the most merciless provocation. All that it was possible to effect, by patient entreaty and respectful remonstrance, he had tried again and again, and invariably in vain. At last, Mr. Henley's unbridled insolence triumphed. Hugh lost his temper—and, in leaving the heartless old man, used language which he afterwards remembered with regret.

To feel that he had attempted to assert the interests of Iris, and that he had failed, was, in Hugh's heated state of mind, an irresistible stimulant to further exertion. It was perhaps not too late yet to make another

attempt to delay (if not to prevent) the marriage.

In sheer desperation, Mountjoy resolved to inform Lord Harry that his union with Miss Henley would be followed by the utter ruin of her expectations from her father. Whether the wild lord only considered his own interests, or whether he was loyally devoted to the interests of the woman whom he loved, in either case the penalty to be paid for the marriage was formidable enough to make him hesitate.

The lights in the lower window, and in the passage, told Hugh that he had arrived in good time at Redburn Road.

He found Mr. Vimpany and the young Irishman sitting together, in the friendliest manner, under the composing influence of tobacco. Primed, as he would have said himself, with only a third glass of grog, the hospitable side of the doctor's character was dis-

played to view. He at once accepted Mountjoy's visit as offering a renewal of friendly relations between them.

'Forgive and forget,' he said, 'there's the way to settle that little misunderstanding, after our dinner at the inn. You know Mr. Mountjoy, my lord? That's right. Draw in your chair, Mountjoy. My professional prospects threaten me with ruin—but while I have a roof over my head, there's always a welcome for a friend. My dear fellow, I have every reason to believe that the doctor who sold me this practice was a swindler. The money is gone, and the patients don't come. Well! I am not quite bankrupt yet; I can offer you a glass of grog. Mix for yourself—we'll make a night of it.'

Hugh explained (with necessary excuses) that his object was to say a few words to Lord Harry in private. The change visible in the doctor's manner, when he had been

made acquainted with this circumstance, was not amiably expressed; he had the air of a man who suspected that an unfair advantage had been taken of him. Lord Harry, on his side, appeared to feel some hesitation in granting a private interview to Mr. Mountjoy.

'Is it about Miss Henley?' he asked.

Hugh admitted that it was. Lord Harry thereupon suggested that they might be acting wisely if they avoided the subject. Mountjoy answered that there were, on the contrary, reasons for approaching the subject sufficiently important to have induced him to leave London for Hampstead at a late hour of the night.

Hearing this, Lord Harry rose to lead the way to another room. Excluded from his visitor's confidence, Mr. Vimpany could at least remind Mountjoy that he exercised authority as master of the house. 'Oh, take

him upstairs, my lord,' said the doctor; '*you* are at home under my humble roof!'

The two young men faced each other in the barely-furnished drawing-room; both sufficiently doubtful of the friendly result of the conference to abstain from seating themselves. Hugh came to the point without wasting time in preparatory words. Admitting that he had heard of Miss Henley's engagement, he asked if Lord Harry was aware of the disastrous consequences to the young lady which would follow her marriage. The reply to this was frankly expressed. The Irish lord knew nothing of the consequences to which Mr. Mountjoy had alluded. Hugh at once enlightened him, and evidently took him completely by surprise.

'May I ask, sir,' he said, 'if you are speaking from your own personal knowledge?'

'I have just come, my lord, from Mr.

Henley's house; and what I have told you I heard from his own lips.'

There was a pause. Hugh was already inclined to think that he had raised an obstacle to the immediate celebration of the marriage. A speedy disappointment was in store for him. Lord Harry was too fond of Iris to be influenced, in his relations with her, by mercenary considerations.

'You put it too strongly,' he said. 'But, let me tell you, Miss Henley is far from being so dependent on her father—he ought to be ashamed of himself, but that's neither here nor there—I say she is far from being so dependent on her father as you seem to think. I am not, I beg to inform you, without resources which I shall offer to her with all my heart and soul. Perhaps, you wish me to descend to particulars? Oh, it's easily done; I have sold my cottage in Ireland.'

'For a large sum—in these times?' Hugh inquired.

'Never mind the sum, Mr. Mountjoy—let the fact be enough for you. And, while we are on the question of money (a disgusting question, with which I refuse to associate the most charming woman in existence), don't forget that Miss Henley has an income of her own; derived, as I understand, from her mother's fortune. You will do me the justice, sir, to believe that I shall not touch a farthing of it.'

'Certainly! But her mother's fortune,' Mountjoy continued, obstinately presenting the subject on its darkest side, 'consists of shares in a Company. Shares rise and fall—and Companies sometimes fail.'

'And a friend's anxiety about Miss Henley's affairs sometimes takes a mighty disagreeable form,' the Irishman added, his temper begin-

ning to show itself without disguise. 'Let's suppose the worst that can happen, and get all the sooner to the end of a conversation which is far from being agreeable to me. We'll say, if you like, that Miss Henley's shares are waste paper, and her pockets (God bless her!) as empty as pockets can be, does she run any other risk that occurs to your ingenuity in becoming my wife?'

'Yes, she does,' Hugh was provoked into saying. 'In the case you have just supposed, she runs the risk of being left a destitute widow—if you die.'

He was prepared for an angry reply—for another quarrel added, on that disastrous night, to the quarrel with Mr. Henley. To his astonishment, Lord Harry's brightly-expressive eyes rested on him with a look of mingled distress and alarm. 'God forgive me!' he said to himself, 'I never thought of that! What am I to do? What am I to do?'

Mountjoy observed that deep discouragement and failed to understand it.

Here was a desperate adventurer, whose wanderings had over and over again placed his life in jeopardy, now apparently overcome by merely having his thoughts directed to the subject of death! To place on the circumstances such a construction as this was impossible, after a moment's reflection. The other alternative was to assume that there must be some anxiety burdening Lord Harry's mind, which he had motives for keeping concealed—and here indeed the true explanation had been found. The Irish lord had reasons, known only to himself, for recoiling from the contemplation of his own future. After the murder of Arthur Mountjoy, he had severed his connection with the assassinating brotherhood of the Invincibles; and he had then been warned that he took this step at the peril of his life, if he remained in Great

Britain after he had made himself an object of distrust to his colleagues. The discovery, by the secret tribunal, of his return from South Africa would be followed inevitably by the sentence of death. Such was the terrible position which Mountjoy's reply had ignorantly forced him to confront. His fate depended on the doubtful security of his refuge in the doctor's house.

While Hugh was still looking at him, in grave doubt, a new idea seemed to spring to life in Lord Harry's mind. He threw off the oppression that had weighed on his spirits in an instant. His manner towards Mountjoy changed, with the suddenness of a flash of light, from the extreme of coldness to the extreme of cordiality.

'I have got it at last!' he exclaimed. 'Let's shake hands. My dear sir, you're the best friend I have ever had!'

The cool Englishman asked: 'In what way?'

'In this way, to be sure! You have reminded me that I can provide for Miss Henley—and the sooner the better. There's our friend the doctor downstairs, ready to be my reference. Don't you see it?'

Obstacles that might prevent the marriage, Mountjoy was ready enough to see. Facilities that might hasten the marriage, found his mind hard of access to new impressions.

'Are you speaking seriously?' he said.

The Irishman's irritable temper began to show itself again.

'Why do you doubt it?' he asked.

'I fail to understand you,' Mountjoy replied.

Never—as events were yet to prove—had words of such serious import fallen from

Lord Harry's lips as the words that he spoke next.

'Clear your mind of jealousy,' he said, 'and you will understand me well enough. I agree with you that I am bound to provide for my widow—and I mean to do it by insuring my life.'

THE END OF THE SECOND PERIOD

THIRD PERIOD

CHAPTER XXIII

NEWS OF IRIS

AFTER his interview with the Irish lord, Mountjoy waited for two days, in the expectation of hearing from Iris. No reply arrived. Had Mr. Vimpany failed to forward the letter that had been entrusted to him?

On the third day, Hugh wrote to make inquiries.

The doctor returned the letter that had been confided to his care, and complained in his reply of the ungrateful manner in which he had been treated. Miss Henley had not

trusted him with her new address in London; and Lord Harry had suddenly left Redburn Road; bidding his host good-bye in a few lines of commonplace apology, and nothing more. Mr. Vimpany did not deny that he had been paid for his medical services; but, he would ask, was nothing due to friendship? Was one man justified in enjoying another man's hospitality, and then treating him like a stranger? 'I have done with them both—and I recommend you, my dear sir, to follow my example.' In those terms the angry (and sober) doctor expressed his sentiments, and offered his advice.

Mountjoy laid down the letter in despair.

His last poor chance of preventing the marriage depended on his being still able to communicate with Iris—and she was as completely lost to him as if she had taken flight to the other end of the world. It might have been possible to discover her by following the

movements of Lord Harry, but he too had disappeared without leaving a trace behind him. The precious hours and days were passing—and Hugh was absolutely helpless.

Tortured by anxiety and suspense, he still lingered at the hotel in London. More than once he decided on giving up the struggle, and returning to his pretty cottage in Scotland. More than once he deferred taking the journey. At one time, he dreaded to hear that Iris was married, if she wrote to him. At another time, he felt mortified and disappointed by the neglect which her silence implied. Was she near him, or far from him? In England, or out of England? Who could say!

After more weary days of waiting and suffering a letter arrived, addressed to Mountjoy in a strange handwriting, and bearing the post-mark of Paris. The signature revealed that his correspondent was Lord Harry.

His first impulse was to throw the letter into the fire, unread. There could be little doubt, after the time that had passed, of the information that it would contain. Could he endure to be told of the marriage of Iris, by the man who was her husband? Never! There was something humiliating in the very idea of it. He arrived at that conclusion—and what did he do in spite of it? He read the letter.

Lord Harry wrote with scrupulous politeness of expression; he regretted that circumstances had prevented him from calling on Mr. Mountjoy, before he left England. After the conversation that had taken place at Mr. Vimpany's house, he felt it his duty to inform Mr. Mountjoy that he had insured his life—and, he would add, for a sum of money amply, and more than amply, sufficient to provide for his wife in the event of her surviving him. Lady Harry desired her kind

regards, and would write immediately to her old and valued friend. In the meantime, he would conclude by repeating the expression of his sense of obligation to Mr. Mountjoy.

Hugh looked back at the first page of the letter, in search of the writer's address. It was simply 'Paris.' The intention to prevent any further correspondence, or any personal communication, could hardly have been more plainly implied. In another moment, the letter was in the fire.

In two days more, Hugh heard from Iris.

She, too, wrote regretfully of the sudden departure from England; adding, however, that it was her own doing. A slip of the tongue, on Lord Harry's part, in the course of conversation, had led her to fear that he was still in danger from political conspirators with whom he had imprudently connected himself. She had accordingly persuaded him to tell her the whole truth, and had thereupon insisted

on an immediate departure for the Continent. She and her husband were now living in Paris; Lord Harry having friends in that city whose influence might prove to be of great importance to his pecuniary prospects. Some sentences followed, expressing the writer's grateful remembrance of all that she had owed to Hugh in past days, and her earnest desire that they might still hear of each other from time to time, by correspondence. She could not venture to anticipate the pleasure of receiving a visit from him, under present circumstances. But, she hoped that he would not object to write to her, addressing his letters, for the present, to post-restante.

In a postscript a few words were added, alluding to Mr. Vimpany. Hugh was requested not to answer any inquiries which that bad man might venture to make, relating to her husband or to herself. In the bygone days, she had been thankful to the doctor for

the care which he had taken, medically speaking, of Rhoda Bennet. But, since that time, his behaviour to his wife, and the opinions which he had expressed in familiar conversation with Lord Harry, had convinced her that he was an unprincipled person. All further communication with him (if her influence could prevent it) must come to an end.

Still as far as ever from feeling reconciled to the marriage, Mountjoy read this letter with a feeling of resentment which disinclined him to answer it.

He believed (quite erroneously) that Iris had written to him under the superintendence of her husband. There were certain phrases which had been, as he chose to suspect, dictated by Lord Harry's distrust—jealous distrust, perhaps—of his wife's friend. Mountjoy would wait to reply, until, as he bitterly expressed it, Iris was able to write to him without the assistance of her master.

Again he thought of returning to Scotland —and, again, he hesitated.

On this occasion, he discovered objections to the cottage which had not occurred to him while Iris was a single woman. The situation was solitary; his nearest neighbours were fishermen. Here and there at some little distance, there were only a few scattered houses inhabited by retired tradesmen. Further away yet, there was the country-seat of an absent person of distinction, whose health suffered in the climate of Scotland. The lonely life in prospect, on the shores of the Solway, now daunted Mountjoy for the first time.

He decided on trying what society in London would do to divert his mind from the burdens and anxieties that weighed on it. Acquaintances whom he had neglected were pleasantly surprised by visits from their rich and agreeable young friend. He attended dinner-parties; he roused hopes in mothers and daughters by

accepting invitations to balls; he reappeared at his club. Was there any relief to his mind in this? Was there even amusement? No; he was acting a part, and he found it a hard task to keep up appearances. After a brief and brilliant interval, society knew him no more.

Left by himself again he enjoyed one happy evening in London. It was the evening on which he relented, in spite of himself, and wrote to Iris.

CHAPTER XXIV

LORD HARRY'S HONEYMOON

THE next day, Hugh received a visit from the last person in the little world of his acquaintance whom he expected to see. The lost Mrs. Vimpany presented herself at the hotel.

She looked unnaturally older since Mountjoy had last seen her. Her artificial complexion was gone. The discarded rouge that had once overlaid her cheeks, through a long succession of years, had left the texture of the skin coarse, and had turned the colour of it to a dull yellowish tinge. Her hair, once so skilfully darkened, was now permitted to tell the truth, and revealed the sober colouring of

age, in gray. The lower face had fallen away in substance; and even the penetrating brightness of her large dark eyes was a little dimmed. All that had been left in her of the attractions of past days, owed its vital preservation to her stage training. Her suave grace of movement, and the deep elocutionary melody of her voice, still identified Mrs. Vimpany—disguised as she was in a dress of dull brown, shorn without mercy of the milliner's hideous improvements to the figure. 'Will you shake hands with me, Mr. Mountjoy?' Those were the first words she said to him, in a sad subdued manner, on entering the room.

'Why not?' Hugh asked, giving her his hand.

'You can have no very favourable remembrance of me,' she answered. 'But I hope to produce a better impression—if you can spare me a little of your time. You may,

or may not, have heard of my separation from my husband. Anyway, it is needless to trouble you on the subject; you know Mr. Vimpany; you can guess what I have suffered, and why I have left him. If he comes to you, I hope you will not tell him where Lady Harry is——'

Hugh interposed: 'Pray don't speak of her by that name! Call her "Iris," as I do.'

A faint reflection of the old stage-smile trembled on Mrs. Vimpany's worn and weary face:

'Ah, Mr. Mountjoy, I know whom she ought to have married! The worst enemy of women is their ignorance of men—and they only learn to know better, when it is too late. I try to be hopeful for Iris, in the time to come, but my fears conquer me.'

She paused, sighed, and pressed her open hand on her bosom; unconsciously betraying

in that action some of the ineradicable training of the theatre.

'I am almost afraid to say that I love Iris,' she resumed; 'but this I know; if I am not so bad as I once was, I owe it to that dearest and sweetest of women! But for the days that I passed in her company, I might never have tried to atone for my past life by works of mercy. When other people take the way of amendment, I wonder whether they find it as hard to follow, at first, as I did?'

'There is no doubt of it, Mrs. Vimpany—if people are sincere. Beware of the sinners who talk of sudden conversion and perfect happiness. May I ask how you began your new life?'

'I began unhappily, Mr. Mountjoy—I joined a nursing Sisterhood. Before long, a dispute broke out among them. Think of women who call themselves Christians, quarrelling about churches and church

services—priest's vestments and attitudes, and candles and incense! I left them, and went to a hospital, and found the doctors better Christians than the Sisters. I am not talking about my own poor self (as you will soon see) without a reason. My experience in the hospital led to other things. I nursed a lady through a tedious illness, and was trusted to take her to some friends in the south of France. On my return, I thought of staying for a few days in Paris—it was an opportunity of seeing how the nurses did their work in the French hospitals. And, oh, it was far more than that! In Paris, I found Iris again.'

'By accident?' Hugh asked.

'I am not sure,' Mrs. Vimpany answered, 'that there are such things as meetings by accident. She and her husband were among the crowds of people on the Boulevards, who sit taking their coffee in view of the other

crowds, passing along the street. I went by, without noticing them. *She* saw me, and sent Lord Harry to bring me back. I have been with them every day, at her invitation, from that time to this; and I have seen their life.'

She stopped, noticing that Hugh grew restless. 'I am in doubt,' she said, 'whether you wish to hear more of their life in Paris.'

Mountjoy at once controlled himself.

'Go on,' he said quietly.

'Even if I tell you that Iris is perfectly happy?'

'Go on,' Hugh repeated.

'May I confess,' she resumed, 'that her husband is irresistible—not only to his wife, but even to an old woman like me? After having known him for years at his worst, as well as at his best, I am still foolish enough to feel the charm of his high spirits and his delightful good-humour. Sober English people,

if they saw him now, would almost think him a fit subject to be placed under restraint. One of his wild Irish ideas of expressing devotion to his wife is, that they shall forget they are married, and live the lives of lovers. When they dine at a restaurant, he insists on having a private room. He takes her to public balls, and engages her to dance with him for the whole evening. When she stays at home, and is a little fatigued, he sends me to the piano, and whirls her round the room in a waltz. "Nothing revives a woman," he says, "like dancing with the man she loves." When she is out of breath, and I shut up the piano, do you know what he does? He actually kisses Me—and says he is expressing his wife's feeling for me when she is not able to do it herself! He sometimes dines out with men, and comes back all on fire with the good wine, and more amiable than ever. On these occasions his pockets are full of sweet-

meats, stolen for "his angel" from the dessert. "Am I a little tipsy?" he asks. "Oh, don't be angry; it's all for love of you. I have been in the highest society, my darling; proposing your health over and over and over again, and drinking to you deeper than all the rest of the company. You don't blame me? Ah, but I blame myself. I was wrong to leave you, and dine with men. What do I want with the society of men, when I have your society? Drinking your health is a lame excuse. I will refuse all invitations for the future that don't include my wife." And—mind!—he really means it, at the time. Two or three days later, he forgets his good resolutions, and dines with the men again, and comes home with more charming excuses, and stolen sweetmeats, and good resolutions. I am afraid I weary you, Mr. Mountjoy.'

'You surprise me,' Hugh replied. 'Why do I hear all this of Lord Harry?'

Mrs. Vimpany left her chair. The stage directions of other days had accustomed her to rise when the character she played had anything serious to say. Her own character still felt the animating influence of dramatic habit: she rose now, and laid her hand impressively on Mountjoy's shoulder.

'I have not thoughtlessly tried your patience,' she said. 'Now that I am away from the influence of Lord Harry, I can recall my former experience of him; and I am afraid I can see the end that is coming. He will drift into bad company; he will listen to bad advice; and he will do things in the future which he might shrink from doing now. When that time comes, I fear him! I fear him!'

'When that time comes,' Hugh repeated, 'if I have any influence left over his wife, he shall find her capable of protecting herself. Will you give me her address in Paris?'

'Willingly—if you will promise not to go to her till she really needs you?'

'Who is to decide when she needs me?'

'I am to decide,' Mrs. Vimpany answered; 'Iris writes to me confidentially. If anything happens which she may be unwilling to trust to a letter, I believe I shall hear of it from her maid.'

'Are you sure the maid is to be relied on?' Mountjoy interposed.

'She is a silent creature, so far as I know anything of her,' Mrs. Vimpany admitted; 'and her manner doesn't invite confidence. But I have spoken with Fanny Mere; I am satisfied that she is true to her mistress and grateful to her mistress in her own strange way. If Iris is in any danger, I shall not be left in ignorance of it. Does this incline you to consult with me, before you decide on going to Paris? Don't stand on ceremony; say honestly, Yes or No.'

Honestly, Hugh said 'Yes.'

He was at once trusted with the address of Iris. At the same time, Mrs. Vimpany undertook that he should know what news she received from Paris as soon as she knew it herself. On that understanding they parted, for the time being.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DOCTOR IN DIFFICULTIES

SLOWLY the weeks passed. Strictly Mrs. Vimpany kept her promise. When she heard from Iris the letter was always sent to Hugh, to be returned after he had read it. Events in the lives of the newly-married pair, many of which pointed to the end that Mrs. Vimpany saw and dreaded, were lightly, sometimes jestingly, related by the young wife. Her blind belief in her husband, sincerely asserted in the earlier part of the correspondence, began to betray, in her later letters, signs of self-delusion. It was sad indeed to see that bright intelligence rendered incapable of

conceiving suspicions, which might have occurred to the mind of a child.

When the latest news from Paris followed, in due course, Mountjoy was informed of it by a note from Mrs. Vimpany, expressed in these terms:

'My last letter from Iris is really no letter at all. It simply encloses a circular, with her love, and asks me to send it on to you. If it is in your power to make inquiries in the right quarter, I am sure you will not hesitate to take the trouble. There can be little doubt, as I think, that Lord Harry is engaged in a hazardous speculation, more deeply than his wife is willing to acknowledge.'

The circular announced the contemplated publication of a weekly newspaper, printed partly in English and partly in French, having its chief office in Paris, and being intended to dispute the advantages of a European circulation with the well-known Continental journal

called *Galignani's Messenger*. A first list of contributors included names of some notoriety in the literature of England and the literature of France. Speculators who wished to know, in the first place, on what security they might reckon, were referred to the managing committee, represented by persons of importance in the financial worlds of London and Paris.

Being in a position to make the inquiries which Mrs. Vimpany had suggested, Hugh received information which verified the statements contained in the circular, and vouched for the good faith of those persons who were concerned in directing the speculation. So far, so good.

But, when the question of success was next discussed, the authorities consulted shook their wise heads. It was impossible to say what losses might not be suffered, and what sums of money might not be required, before the circulation of the new journal would justify

the hope of success. This opinion Hugh communicated to Mrs. Vimpany; Iris was informed of it by that day's post.

A longer time than usual elapsed before any further news of Lord Harry and his wife was received by Mountjoy. When he did at last hear again from Mrs. Vimpany, she forwarded a letter from Iris dated from a new address, in the suburb of Paris called Passy.

From motives of economy (Iris wrote) her husband had decided on a change of residence. They were just established in their new abode, with the advantages of a saving in rent, a pretty little garden to cultivate, and purer air to breathe than the air of Paris. There the letter ended, without the slightest allusion to the forthcoming newspaper, or to the opinion that had been pronounced on the prospects of success.

In forwarding this letter Mrs. Vimpany wrote on the blank page as follows: 'I am

sorry to add that some disquieting news of my husband has reached me. For the present, I will say no more. It is at least possible that the report may not be worthy of belief.'

A few days later the report was confirmed, under circumstances which had certainly not been foreseen. Mr. Vimpany himself arrived at the hotel, on a visit to Mountjoy.

Always more or less superior to the amiable weakness of modesty, the doctor seemed to have risen higher than ever in his own estimation, since Hugh had last seen him. He strutted; he stared confidently at persons and things; authority was in his voice when he spoke, and lofty indulgence distinguished his manner when he listened.

'How are you?' he cried with grand gaiety, as he entered the room. 'Fine weather, isn't it, for the time of the year? You don't look well. I wonder whether you notice any change in Me?'

'You seem to be in good spirits,' Hugh replied, not very cordially.

'Do I carry my head high?' Mr. Vimpany went on. 'When calamity strikes at a man, don't let him cringe and cry for pity—let him hit back again! Those are my principles. Look at me. Now do look at me. Here I am, a cultivated person, a member of an honourable profession, a man of art and accomplishment—stripped of every blessed thing belonging to me but the clothes I stand up in. Give me your hand, Mountjoy. It's the hand, sir, of a bankrupt.'

'You don't seem to mind it much,' Mountjoy remarked.

'Why should I mind it?' asked the doctor. 'There isn't a medical man in England who has less reason to reproach himself than I have. Have I wasted money in rash speculations? Not a farthing. Have I been fool enough to bet at horse-races? My worst enemy

daren't say it of me. What have I done then? I have toiled after virtue—that's what I have done. Oh, there's nothing to laugh at! When a doctor tries to be the medical friend of humanity; when he only asks leave to cure disease, to soothe pain, to preserve life —isn't that virtue? And what is my reward? I sit at home, waiting for my suffering fellow-creatures; and the only fellow-creatures who come to me are too poor to pay. I have gone my rounds, calling on the rich patients whom I bought when I bought the practice. Not one of them wanted me. Men, women, and children, were all inexcusably healthy—devil take them! Is it wonderful if a man becomes bankrupt, in such a situation as mine? By Jupiter, I go farther than that! I say, a man owes it to himself (as a protest against undeserved neglect) to become a bankrupt. If you will allow me, I'll take a chair.'

He sat down with an air of impudent in-

dependence, and looked round the room. A little cabinet, containing liqueurs, stood open on the side-board. Mr. Vimpany got up again. 'May I take a friendly liberty?' he said—and helped himself, without waiting for permission.

Hugh bore with this, mindful of the mistake that he had committed in consenting to receive the doctor. At the same time he was sufficiently irritated to take a friendly liberty on his side. He crossed the room to the side-board, and locked up the liqueurs. Mr. Vimpany's brazen face flushed deeply (not with shame); he opened his lips to say something worthy of himself, controlled the impulse, and burst into a boisterous laugh. He had evidently some favour still to ask.

'Devilish good!' he broke out cheerfully. 'Do you remember the landlady's claret? Ha! you don't want to tempt me this time. Well! well! to return to my bankruptcy.'

Hugh had heard enough of his visitor's

bankruptcy. 'I am not one of your creditors,' he said.

Mr. Vimpany made a smart reply: 'Don't you be too sure of that. Wait a little.'

'Do you mean,' Mountjoy asked, 'that you have come here to borrow money of me?'

'Time—give me time,' the doctor pleaded; 'this is not a matter to be despatched in a hurry; this is a matter of business. You will hardly believe it,' he resumed, 'but I have actually been in my present position, once before.' He looked towards the cabinet of liqueurs. 'If I had the key,' he said, 'I should like to try a drop more of your good Curaçoa. You don't see it?'

'I am waiting to hear what your business is,' Hugh replied.

Mr. Vimpany's pliable temper submitted with perfect amiability. 'Quite right,' he said; 'let us return to business. I am a man who possesses great fertility of resource. On

the last occasion when my creditors pounced on my property, do you think I was discouraged? Nothing of the sort! My regular medical practice had broken down under me. Very well—I tried my luck as a quack. In plain English, I invented a patent medicine. The one thing wanting was money enough to advertise it. False friends buttoned up their pockets. You see?'

'Oh, yes; I see.'

'In that case,' Mr. Vimpany continued, 'you will not be surprised to hear that I draw on my resources again. You have no doubt noticed that we live in an age of amateurs. Amateurs write, paint, compose music, perform on the stage. I, too, am one of the accomplished persons who have taken possession of the field of Art. Did you observe the photographic portraits on the walls of my dining-room? They are of my doing, sir—whether you observed them or not. I am

one of the handy medical men, who can use the photograph. Not that I mention it generally; the public have got a narrow-minded notion that a doctor ought to be nothing but a doctor. My name won't appear in a new work that I am contemplating. Of course, you want to know what my new work is. I'll tell you, in the strictest confidence. Imagine (if you can) a series of superb photographs of the most eminent doctors in England with memoirs of their lives written by themselves; published once a month, price half a crown. If there isn't money in that idea, there is no money in anything. Exert yourself, my good friend. Tell me what you think of it?'

'I don't understand the subject,' Mountjoy replied. 'May I ask why you take *me* into your confidence?'

'Because I look upon you as my best friend.'

'You are very good. But surely, Mr. Vimpany, you have older friends in your circle of acquaintance than I am.'

'Not one,' the doctor answered promptly, 'whom I trust as I trust you. Let me give you a proof of it.'

'Is the proof in any way connected with money?' Hugh inquired.

'I call that hard on me,' Mr. Vimpany protested. 'No unfriendly interruptions, Mountjoy! I offer a proof of kindly feeling. Do you mean to hurt me?'

'Certainly not. Go on.'

'Thank you; a little encouragement goes a long way with me. I have found a bookseller who will publish my contemplated work, on commission. Not a soul has yet seen the estimate of expenses. I propose to show it to You.'

'Quite needless, Mr. Vimpany.'

'Why quite needless?'

'Because I decline lending you the money.'

'No, no, Mountjoy! You can't really mean that?'

'I do mean it.'

'No!'

'Yes!'

The doctor's face showed a sudden change of expression—a sinister and threatening change. 'Don't drive me into a corner,' he said. 'Think of it again.'

Hugh's capacity for controlling himself gave way at last.

'Do you presume to threaten me?' he said. 'Understand, if you please, that my mind is made up, and that nothing you can say or do will alter it.'

With that declaration he rose from his chair, and waited for Mr. Vimpany's departure.

The doctor put on his hat. His eyes

rested on Hugh, with a look of diabolical malice: 'The time is not far off, Mr. Mountjoy, when you may be sorry you refused me.' He said those words deliberately—and took his leave.

Released from the man's presence, Hugh found himself strangely associating the interests of Iris with the language—otherwise beneath notice—which Mr. Vimpany had used on leaving the room.

In desperate straits for want of money, how would the audacious bankrupt next attempt to fill his empty purse? If he had, by any chance, renewed his relations with his Irish friend—and such an event was at least possible—his next experiment in the art of raising a loan might take him to Paris. Lord Harry had already ventured on a speculation which called for an immediate outlay of money, and which was only expected to put a profit into his pocket at some future period. In the

meanwhile, his resources in money had their limits; and his current expenses would make imperative demands on an ill-filled purse. If the temptation to fail in his resolution to respect his wife's fortune was already trying his fortitude, what better excuse could be offered for yielding than the necessities of an old friend in a state of pecuniary distress?

Looking at the position of Iris, and at the complications which threatened it, from this point of view, Mountjoy left the hotel to consult with Mrs. Vimpany. It rested with her to decide whether the circumstances justified his departure for Paris.

CHAPTER XXVI

LONDON AND PARIS

INFORMED of all that Hugh could tell her relating to his interview with her husband, Mrs. Vimpany understood and appreciated his fears for the future. She failed, however, to agree with him that he would do well to take the journey to France, under present circumstances.

'Wait a little longer in London,' she said. 'If Iris doesn't write to me in the next few days there will be a reason for her silence; and in that case (as I have already told you) I shall hear from Fanny Mere. You shall see me when I get a letter from Paris.'

On the last morning in the week, Mrs. Vimpany was announced. The letter that she brought with her had been written by Fanny Mere. With the pen in her hand, the maid's remarkable character expressed itself as strongly as ever:

'Madam,—I said I would let you know what goes on here, when I thought there was need of it. There seems to be need now. Mr. Vimpany came to us yesterday. He has the spare bedroom. My mistress says nothing, and writes nothing. For that reason, I send you the present writing.—Your humble servant, F.'

Mountjoy was perplexed by this letter, plain as it was.

'It seems strange,' he said, 'that Iris herself has not written to you. She has never hitherto concealed her opinion of Mr. Vimpany.'

'She is concealing it now,' Mr. Vimpany's wife replied gravely.

'Do you know why?'

'I am afraid I do. Iris will not hesitate at any sacrifice of herself to please Lord Harry. She will give him her money when he wants it. If he tells her to alter her opinion of my husband, she will obey him. He can shake her confidence in me, whenever he pleases; and he has very likely done it already.'

'Surely it is time for me to go to her now?' Hugh said.

'Full time,' Mrs. Vimpany admitted—'if you can feel sure of yourself. In the interests

of Iris, can you undertake to be cool and careful?'

'In the interests of Iris, I can undertake anything.'

'One word more,' Mrs. Vimpany continued, 'before you take your departure. No matter, whether appearances are for him, or against him, be always on your guard with my husband. Let me hear from you while you are away; and don't forget that there is an obstacle between you and Iris, which will put even your patience and devotion to a hard trial.'

'You mean her husband?'

'I do.'

There was no more to be said. Hugh set forth on his journey to Paris.

. . . . .

On the morning after his arrival in the French capital, Mountjoy had two alternatives to consider. He might either write to Iris,

and ask when it would be convenient to her to receive him—or he might present himself unexpectedly in the cottage at Passy. Reflection convinced him that his best chance of placing an obstacle in the way of deception would be to adopt the second alternative, and to take Lord Harry and the doctor by surprise.

He went to Passy. The lively French taste had brightened the cottage with colour: the fair white window curtains were tied with rose-coloured ribbons, the blinds were gaily painted, the chimneys were ornamental, the small garden was a paradise of flowers. When Mountjoy rang the bell, the gate was opened by Fanny Mere. She looked at him in grave astonishment.

'Do they expect you?' she asked.

'Never mind that,' Hugh answered. 'Are they at home?'

'They have just finished breakfast, sir.'

'Do you remember my name?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then show me in.'

Fanny opened the door of a room on the ground floor, and announced: 'Mr. Mountjoy.'

The two men were smoking; Iris was watering some flowers in the window. Her colour instantly faded when Hugh entered the room. In doubt and alarm, her eyes questioned Lord Harry. He was in his sweetest state of good-humour. Urged by the genial impulse of the moment, he set the example of a cordial reception. 'This is an agreeable surprise, indeed,' he said, shaking hands with Mountjoy in his easy amiable way. 'It's kind of you to come and see us.' Relieved of anxiety (evidently when she had not expected it), Iris eagerly followed her husband's example; her face recovered its colour, and brightened with its prettiest

smile. Mr. Vimpany stood in a corner; his cigar went out; his own wife would hardly have known him again—he actually presented an appearance of embarrassment! Lord Harry burst out laughing: 'Look at him, Iris! The doctor is shy for the first time in his life.' The Irish good humour was irresistible. The young wife merrily echoed her husband's laugh. Mr. Vimpany, observing the friendly reception offered to Hugh, felt the necessity of adapting himself to circumstances. He came out of his corner with an apology: 'Sorry I misbehaved myself, Mr. Mountjoy, when I called on you in London. Shake hands. No offence—eh?' Iris, in feverish high spirits, mimicked the doctor's coarse tones when he repeated his favourite form of excuse. Lord Harry clapped his hands, delighted with his wife's clever raillery: 'Ha! Mr. Mountjoy, you don't find that her married life has affected her spirits!

May I hope that you have come here to breakfast? The table is ready as you see——' 'And I have been taking lessons, Hugh, in French ways of cooking eggs,' Iris added; 'pray let me show you what I can do.' The doctor chimed in facetiously: 'I'm Lady Harry's medical referee; you'll find her French delicacies half digested for you, sir, before you can open your mouth: signed, Clarence Vimpany, member of the College of Surgeons.' Remembering Mrs. Vimpany's caution, Hugh concealed his distrust of this outbreak of hospitable gaiety, and made his excuses. Lord Harry followed, with more excuses, on his part. He deplored it—but he was obliged to go out. Had Mr. Mountjoy met with the new paper which was to beat *Galignani* out of the field? *The Continental Herald*—there was the title. 'Forty thousand copies of the first number have just flown all over Europe; we have our agencies

in every town of importance, at every point of the compass; and, one of the great proprietors, my dear sir, is the humble individual who now addresses you.' His bright eyes sparkled with boyish pleasure, as he made that announcement of his own importance. If Mr. Mountjoy would kindly excuse him, he had an appointment at the office that morning. 'Get your hat, Vimpany. The fact is our friend here carries a case of consumption in his pocket; consumption of the purse, you understand. I am going to enrol him among the contributors to the newspaper. A series of articles (between ourselves) exposing the humbug of physicians, and asserting with fine satirical emphasis the overstocked state of the medical profession. Ah, well! you'll be glad (won't you?) to talk over old times with Iris. My angel, show our good friend *The Continental Herald*, and mind you keep him here till we get back. Doctor, look alive! Mr.

Mountjoy, au revoir.' They shook hands again heartily. As Mrs. Vimpany had confessed, there was no resisting the Irish lord.

But Hugh's strange experience of that morning was not at an end, yet.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRIDE AT HOME

LEFT alone with the woman whose charm still held him to her, cruelly as she had tried his devotion by her marriage, Mountjoy found the fluent amiability of the husband imitated by the wife. She, too, when the door had hardly closed on Lord Harry, was bent on persuading Hugh that her marriage had been the happiest event of her life.

'Will you think the worse of me,' she began, 'if I own that I had little expectation of seeing you again?'

'Certainly not, Iris.'

'Consider my situation,' she went on.

'When I remembered how you tried (oh, conscientiously tried !) to prevent my marriage —how you predicted the miserable results that would follow, if Harry's life and my life became one—could I venture to hope that you would come here, and judge for yourself? Dear and good friend, I have nothing to fear from the result; your presence was never more welcome to me than it is now !'

Whether it was attributable to prejudice on Mountjoy's part, or to keen and just observation, he detected something artificial in the ring of her enthusiasm; there was not the steady light of truth in her eyes, which he remembered in the past and better days of their companionship. He was a little—just a little—irritated. The temptation to remind her that his distrust of Lord Harry had once been her distrust too, proved to be more than his frailty could resist.

'Your memory is generally exact,' he

said; 'but it hardly serves you now as well as usual.'

'What have I forgotten?'

'You have forgotten the time, my dear, when your opinion was almost as strongly against a marriage with Lord Harry as mine.'

Her answer was ready on the instant: 'Ah, I didn't know him then as well as I know him now!'

Some men, in Mountjoy's position, might have been provoked into hinting that there were sides to her husband's character which she had probably not discovered yet. But Hugh's gentle temper—ruffled for a moment only—had recovered its serenity. Her friend was her true friend still; he said no more on the subject of her marriage.

'Old habits are not easily set aside,' he reminded her. 'I have been so long accustomed to advise you and help you, that I find

myself hoping there may be some need for my services still. Is there no way in which I might relieve you of the hateful presence of Mr. Vimpany?'

'My dear Hugh, I wish you had not mentioned Mr. Vimpany.'

Mountjoy concluded that the subject was disagreeable to her. 'After the opinion of him which you expressed in your letter to me,' he said, 'I ought not to have spoken of the doctor. Pray forgive me.'

Iris looked distressed. 'Oh, you are quite mistaken! The poor doctor has been sadly misjudged; and I'—she shook her head, and sighed penitently—'and I,' she resumed, 'am one among other people who have ignorantly wronged him. Pray consult my husband. Hear what he can tell you—and you will pity Mr. Vimpany. The newspaper makes such large demands on our means that we can do little to help him.

With your recommendation he might find some employment.'

'He has already asked me to assist him, Iris; and I have refused. I can't agree with your change of opinion about Mr. Vimpany.'

'Why not? Is it because he has separated from his wife?'

'That is one reason, among many others,' Mountjoy replied.

'Indeed, indeed you are wrong: Lord Harry has known Mrs. Vimpany for years, and he says—I am truly sorry to hear it—that the separation is her fault.'

Hugh changed the subject again. The purpose which had mainly induced him to leave England had not been mentioned yet.

Alluding to the newspaper, and to the heavy pecuniary demands made by the preliminary expenses of the new journal, he reminded Iris that their long and intimate

friendship permitted him to feel some interest in her affairs. 'I won't venture to express an opinion,' he added; 'let me only ask if Lord Harry's investments in this speculation have compelled him to make some use of your little fortune?'

'My husband refused to touch my fortune,' Iris answered. 'But——' She paused there. 'Do you know how honourably, how nobly, he has behaved?' she abruptly resumed. 'He has insured his life; he has burdened himself with the payment of a large sum of money every year. And all for me, if I am so unfortunate (which God forbid!) as to survive him. When a large share in the newspaper was for sale, do you think I could be ungrateful enough to let him lose the chance of making our fortune, when the profits begin to come in? I insisted on advancing the money—we almost quarrelled about it—but, you know how sweet he is.

I said: "Don't distress me;" and the dearest of men let me have my own way.'

Mountjoy listened in silence. To have expressed what he felt, would have been only to mortify and offend Iris. Old habit (as he had said) had made the idea of devoting himself to her interests the uppermost idea in his mind. He asked if the money had all been spent. Hearing that some of it was still left, he resolved on making the attempt to secure the remains of her fortune to herself.

'Tell me,' he said, 'have you ever heard of such a thing as buying an annuity?'

She knew nothing about it. He carefully explained the method by which a moderate sum of money might be made to purchase a sufficient income for life. She offered no objection, when he proposed to write to his lawyer in London for the necessary particulars. But when he asked her to tell him what the sum was of which she might be

still able to dispose, Iris hesitated, and made no reply.

This time, Hugh arrived at the right conclusion.

It was only too plain to him that what remained of her money represented an amount so trifling that she was ashamed to mention it. Of the need for helping her, there could be no doubt now; and, as for the means, no difficulties presented themselves to Mountjoy —always excepting the one obstacle likely to be offered by the woman herself. Experience warned him to approach her delicately, by the indirect way.

'You know me well enough,' he said, 'to feel sure that I am incapable of saying anything which can embarrass you, or cause a moment's misunderstanding between two old friends. Won't you look at me, Iris, when I am speaking to you?'

She still looked away from him. 'I am

afraid of what you are going to say to me,' she answered coldly.

'Then let me say it at once. In one of your letters, written long since—I don't suppose you remember it—you told me that I was an obstinate man when I once took a thing into my head. You were quite right. My dear, I have taken it into my head that you will be as ready as ever to accept my advice, and will leave me (as your man of business) to buy the annuity——'

She stopped him.

'No,' she cried, 'I won't hear a word more! Do you think I am insensible to years of kindness that I have never deserved? Do you think I forget how nobly you have forgiven me for those cruel refusals which have saddened your life? Is it possible that you expect me to borrow money of You?' She started wildly to her feet. 'I declare, as God hears me, I would rather die than take that

base, that shameful advantage of all your goodness to me. The woman never lived who owed so much to a man, as I owe to you—but not money! Oh, my dear, not money! not money!'

He was too deeply touched to be able to speak to her—and she saw it. 'What a wretch I am,' she said to herself; 'I have made his heart ache!'

He heard those words. Still feeling for her—never, never for himself!—he tried to soothe her. In the passion of her self-reproach, she refused to hear him. Pacing the room from end to end, she fanned the fiery emotion that was consuming her. Now, she reviled herself in language that broke through the restraints by which good breeding sets its seal on a woman's social rank. And now, again, she lost herself more miserably still, and yielded with hysteric recklessness to a bitter outburst of gaiety.

'If you wish to be married happily,' she cried, 'never be as fond of any other woman as you have been of me. We are none of us worth it. Laugh at us, Hugh—do anything but believe in us. We all lie, my friend. And I have been lying—shamelessly! shamelessly!'

He tried to check her. 'Don't talk in that way, Iris,' he said sternly.

She laughed at him. 'Talk?' she repeated. 'It isn't talk; it's a confession.'

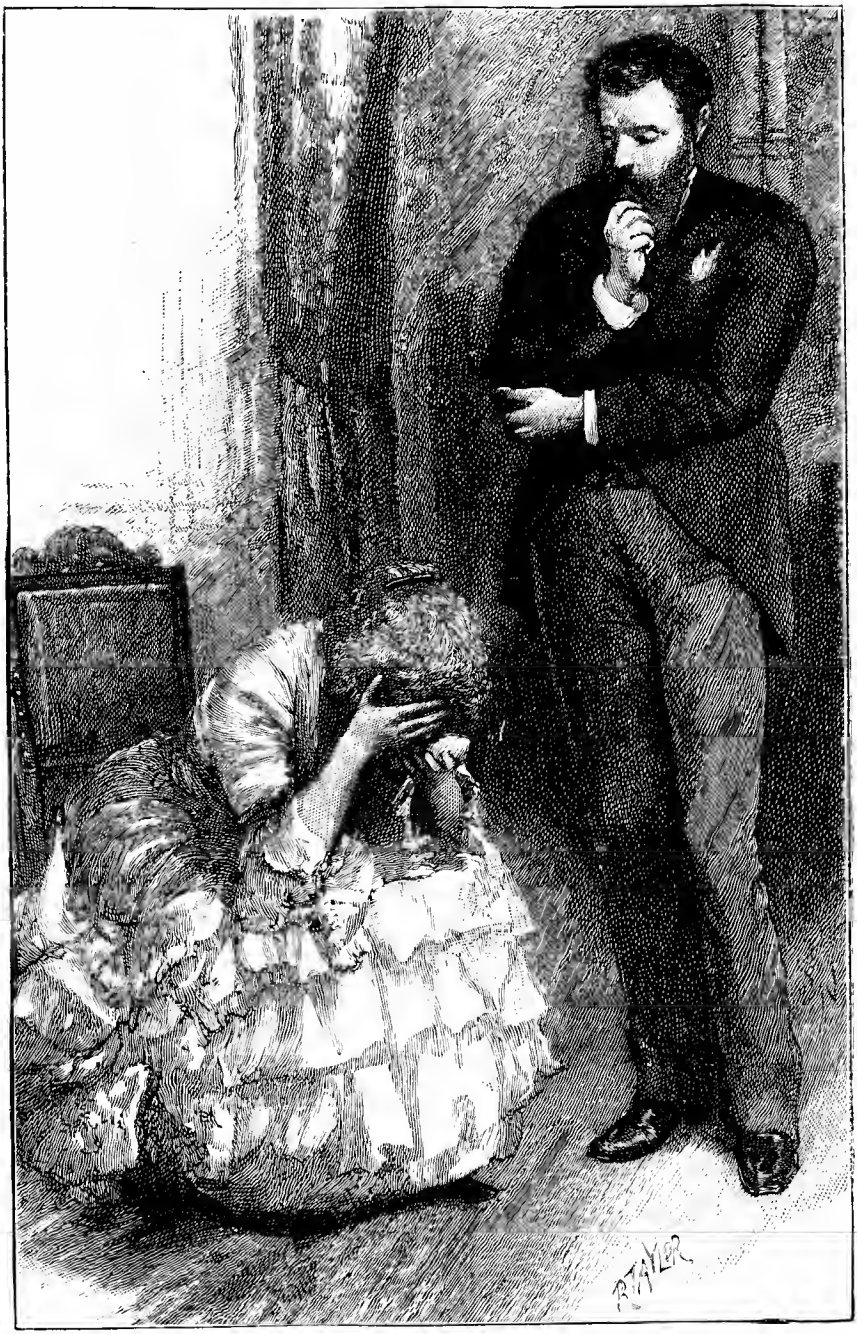
'I don't desire to hear your confession.'

'You must hear it—you have drawn it out of me. Come! we'll enjoy my humiliation together. Contradict every word I said to you about that brute and blackguard, the doctor—and you will have the truth. What horrid inconsistency, isn't it? I can't help myself; I am a wretched, unreasonable creature; I don't know my own mind for two days together, and all through my husband—

I am so fond of him! Harry is delightfully innocent; he's like a nice boy; he never seemed to think of Mr. Vimpany, till it was settled between them that the doctor was to come and stay here—and then he persuaded me—oh, I don't know how!—to see his friend in quite a new light. I believed him—and I believe him still—I mean I *would* believe him, but for you. Will you do me a favour? I wish you wouldn't look at me with those eyes that won't lie; I wish you wouldn't speak to me with that voice which finds things out. Oh, good Heavens! do you suppose I would let you think that my husband is a bad man, and my marriage an unhappy one? Never! If it turns my blood to sit and eat at the same table with Mr. Vimpany, I'm not cruel enough to blame the dear doctor. It's my wickedness that's to blame. We shall quarrel, if you tell me that Harry is capable of letting a rascal be his friend. I'm happy;

I'm happy; I'm happy! do you understand that? Oh, Hugh, I wish you had never come to see me!'

She burst into a passionate fit of weeping, broken down at last under the terrible strain laid on her. 'Let me hide myself!' was all that Iris could say to her old friend—before she ran out of the room, and left him.



She burst into a passionate fit of weeping, broken down at last under the terrible strain laid on her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MAID AND THE KEYHOLE

DEEPLY as she had grieved him, keenly as he felt that his worst fears for her threatened already to be realised, it was characteristic of Mountjoy that he still refused to despair of Iris—even with the husband's influence against him.

The moral deterioration of her, revealed in the false words that she had spoken, and in the deceptions that she had attempted, would have justified the saddest misgivings, but for the voluntary confession which had followed, and the signs which it had shown of the better nature still struggling to assert

itself. How could Hugh hope to encourage that effort of resistance to the evil influences that were threatening her—first and foremost among them being the arrival of Vimpany at the cottage. His presence kept her in a state of perpetual contention between her own wise instincts which distrusted him, and her husband's authoritative assertions which recommended him to her confidence. No greater service could be rendered to Iris than the removal of this man—but how could it be accomplished, without giving offence to her husband? Mountjoy's mind was still in search of a means of overcoming the obstacle thus presented, when he heard the door open. Had Iris recovered herself? or had Lord Harry and his friend returned?

The person who now entered the room was the strange and silent maid, Fanny Mere.

'Can I speak to you, sir?'

'Certainly. What is it?'

'Please give me your address.'

'For your mistress?'

'Yes.'

'Does she wish to write to me?'

'Yes.'

Hugh gave the strange creature the address of his hotel in Paris. For a moment, her eyes rested on him with an expression of steady scrutiny. She opened the door to go out—stopped—considered—came back again.

'I want to speak for myself,' she said. 'Do you care to hear what a servant has to say?'

Mountjoy replied that he was ready to hear what she had to say. She at once stepped up to him, and addressed him in these words:

'I think you are fond of my mistress?'

An ordinary man might have resented the familiar manner in which she had expressed herself. Mountjoy waited for what was still

to come. Fanny Mere abruptly went on, with a nearer approach to agitation in her manner than she had shown yet:

'My mistress took me into her service; she trusted me when other ladies would have shown me the door. When she sent for me to see her, my character was lost; I had nobody to feel for me, nobody to help me. She is the one friend who held out a hand to me. I hate the men; I don't care for the women. Except one. Being a servant I mustn't say I love that one. If I was a lady, I don't know that I should say it. Love is cant; love is rubbish. Tell me one thing. Is the doctor a friend of yours?'

'The doctor is nothing of the kind.'

'Perhaps he is your enemy?'

'I can hardly say that.'

She looked at Hugh discontentedly. 'I want to get at it,' she said. 'Why can't we understand each other? Will you laugh at

me, if I say the first thing that comes into my head? Are you a good swimmer?'

An extraordinary question, even from Fanny Mere. It was put seriously—and seriously Mountjoy answered it. He said that he was considered to be a good swimmer.

'Perhaps,' she continued, 'you have saved people's lives?'

'I have twice been so fortunate as to save lives,' he replied.

'If you saw the doctor drowning, would you save him? *I* wouldn't!'

'Do you hate him as bitterly as that?' Hugh asked.

She passed the question over without notice. 'I wish you would help me to get at it,' she persisted. 'Suppose you could rid my mistress of that man by giving him a kick, would you up with your foot and do it?'

'Yes—with pleasure.'

'Thank you, sir. Now I've got it. Mr. Mountjoy, the doctor is the curse of my mistress's life. I can't bear to see it. If we are not relieved of him somehow, I shall do something wrong. When I wait at table, and see him using his knife, I want to snatch it out of his hand, and stick it into him. I had a hope that my lord might turn him out of the house when they quarrelled. My lord is too wicked himself to do it. For the love of God, sir, help my mistress—or show me the way how!'

Mountjoy began to be interested. 'How do you know,' he asked, 'that Lord Harry and the doctor have quarrelled?'

Without the slightest appearance of embarrassment, Fanny Mere informed him that she had listened at the door, while her master and his friend were talking of their secrets. She had also taken an opportunity of looking through the keyhole. 'I suppose,

sir,' said this curious woman, still speaking quite respectfully, 'you have never tried that way yourself?'

'Certainly not!'

'Wouldn't you do it to serve my mistress?'

'No.'

'And yet, you're fond of her! You are a merciful one—the only merciful one, so far as I know—among men. Perhaps, if you were frightened about her, you might be more ready with your help. I wonder whether I can frighten you? Will you let me try?'

The woman's faithful attachment to Iris pleaded for her with Hugh. 'Try, if you like,' he said kindly.

Speaking as seriously as ever, Fanny proceeded to describe her experience at the keyhole. What she had seen was not worth relating. What she had heard, proved to be more important.

The talk between my lord and the doctor

had been about raising money. They had different notions of how to do that. My lord's plan was to borrow what was wanted, on his life-insurance. The doctor told him that he couldn't do that, till his insurance had been going on for three or four years at least. 'I have something better and bolder to propose,' says Mr. Vimpany. It must have been also something wicked—for he whispered it in the master's ear. My lord didn't take to it kindly. 'How do you think I could face my wife,' he says, 'if she discovered me?' The doctor says: 'Don't be afraid of your wife; Lady Harry will get used to many things which she little thought of before she married you.' Says my lord to that: 'I have done my best, Vimpany, to improve my wife's opinion of you. If you say much more, I shall come round to her way of thinking. Drop it!'

'All right,' says the doctor, 'I'll drop it now, and wait to pick it up again till you

come to your last bank note.' There the talk ended for that day—and Fanny would be glad to know what Mr. Mountjoy thought of it.

'I think you have done me a service,' Hugh replied.

'Tell me how, sir.'

'I can only tell you this, Fanny. You have shown me how to relieve your mistress of the doctor.'

For the first time, the maid's impenetrable composure completely failed her. The smouldering fire in Fanny Mere flamed up. She impulsively kissed Mountjoy's hand. The moment her lips touched it she shrank back: the natural pallor of her face became whiter than ever. Startled by the sudden change, Hugh asked if she was ill.

She shook her head.

'It isn't that. Yours is the first man's hand I have kissed, since——' She checked herself. 'I beg you won't ask me about it.

I only meant to thank you, sir; I do thank you with all my heart—I mustn't stay here any longer.'

As she spoke the sound of a key was heard, opening the lock of the cottage door. Lord Harry had returned.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CONQUEST OF MR. VIMPANY

THE Irish lord came in—with his medical friend sulkily in attendance on him. He looked at Fanny, and asked where her mistress was.

'My lady is in her room, sir.'

Hearing this, he turned sharply to

Mountjoy. On the point of speaking, he seemed to think better of it, and went to his wife's room. The maid followed. 'Get rid of him now,' she whispered to Hugh, glancing at the doctor. Mr. Vimpany was in no very approachable humour—standing at the window, with his hands in his empty pockets, gloomily looking out. But Hugh was not disposed to neglect the opportunity; he ventured to say; 'You don't seem to be in such good spirits as usual.'

The doctor gruffly expressed his opinion that Mr. Mountjoy would not be particularly cheerful, in his place. My lord had taken him to the office on the distinct understanding that he was to earn a little pocket-money by becoming one of the contributors to the newspaper. And how had it ended? The editor had declared that his list of writers was full, and begged leave to suggest that Mr. Vimpany should wait for the next vacancy. A most

impertinent proposal! Had Lord Harry—a proprietor, remember—exerted his authority? Not he! His lordship had dropped the doctor 'like a hot potato,' and had meanly submitted to his own servant. What did Mr. Mountjoy think of such conduct as that?

Hugh answered the question, with his own end in view. Paving the way for Mr. Vimpany's departure from the cottage at Passy, he made a polite offer of his services.

'Can't I help you out of your difficulty?' he said.

'You!' cried the doctor. 'Have you forgotten how you received me, sir, when I asked for a loan at your hotel in London?'

Hugh admitted that he might have spoken hastily. 'You took me by surprise,' he said, 'and (perhaps I was mistaken on my side) I thought you were, to say the least of it, not particularly civil. You did certainly use

threatening language when you left me. No man likes to be treated in that way.'

Mr. Vimpany's big bold eyes stared at Mountjoy in a state of bewilderment. 'Are you trying to make a fool of me?' he asked.

'I am incapable, Mr. Vimpany, of an act of rudeness towards anybody.'

'If you come to that,' the doctor stoutly declared, 'I am incapable too. It's plain to me that we have been misunderstanding each other. Wait a bit; I want to go back for a moment to that threatening language which you complained of just now. I was sorry for what I had said, as soon as your door was shut on me. On my way downstairs, I did think of turning back and making a friendly apology, before I gave you up. Suppose I had done that?' Mr. Vimpany asked, wondering internally whether Mountjoy was foolish enough to believe him.

Hugh advanced a little nearer to the design that he had in view.

'You might have found me more kindly disposed towards you,' he said, 'than you had anticipated.'

This encouraging reply cost him an effort. He had stooped to the unworthy practice of perverting what he had said and done, on a former occasion, to serve a present interest. Remind himself as he might of the end which, in the interests of Iris, did really appear to justify the means, he still sank to a place in his own estimation which he was honestly ashamed to occupy.

Under other circumstances, his hesitation, slight as it was, might have excited suspicion. As things were, Mr. Vimpany could only discover golden possibilities that dazzled his eyes. 'I wonder whether you're in the humour,' he said, 'to be kindly disposed towards me, now?'

It was needless to be careful of the feelings of such a man as this. 'Suppose you had the money you want, in your pocket,' Hugh suggested, 'what would you do with it?'

'Go back to London, to be sure, and publish the first number of that work of mine, I told you of.'

'And leave your friend, Lord Harry?'

'What good is my friend to me? He's nearly as poor as I am—he sent for me to advise him—I put him up to a way of filling both our pockets—and he wouldn't hear of it. What sort of a friend do you call that?'

Pay him and get rid of him. There was the course of proceeding suggested by the private counsellor in Mountjoy's bosom.

'Have you got the publisher's estimate of expenses?' he asked.

The doctor instantly produced the document.

To a rich man the sum required was, after all, trifling enough. Mountjoy sat down at the writing table. As he took up a pen, Mr. Vimpany's protuberant eyes looked as if they would fly out of his head. 'If I lend you the money——' Hugh began. ('Yes? yes?' cried the doctor)—'I do so on condition that nobody is to know of the loan but ourselves.' 'Oh, sir, on my sacred word of honour!'——An order on Mountjoy's bankers in Paris for the necessary amount, with something added for travelling expenses, checked Mr. Vimpany in full career of protestation. He tried to begin again: 'My friend! my benefactor!'——He was stopped once more. His friend and benefactor pointed to the clock. 'If you want the money to-day, you have just time to get to Paris before the bank closes.' Mr. Vimpany did want the money—always wanted the money: his gratitude burst out for the third time: 'God

bless you!'——The object of that highly original form of benediction pointed through the window in the direction of the railway station. Mr. Vimpany struggled no longer to express his feelings—he had made his last sacrifice to appearances—he caught the train.

The door of the room had been left open. A voice outside said: 'Has he gone?'

'Come in, Fanny,' said Mountjoy. 'He will return to London either to-night or to-morrow morning.'

The strange maid put her head in at the door. 'I'll be at the terminus,' she said, 'and make sure of him.'

Her head suddenly disappeared, before it was possible to speak to her again. Was there some other person outside? The other person entered the room: it was Lord Harry. He spoke without his customary smile.

'I want a word with you, Mr. Mountjoy.'

'About what, my lord?'

That direct question seemed to confuse the Irishman. He hesitated.

'About you,' he said—and stopped to consider. 'And another person,' he added mysteriously.

Hugh was constitutionally a hater of mysteries. He felt the need of a more definite reply, and asked for it plainly.

'Does your lordship associate that other person with me?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Who is the person?'

'My wife.'

CHAPTER XXX

SAXON AND CELT

WHEN amicable relations between two men happen to be in jeopardy, there is least danger of an ensuing quarrel if the friendly intercourse has been of artificial growth, on either side. In this case, the promptings of self-interest, and the laws of politeness, have been animating influences throughout; acting under conditions which assist the effort of self-control. And for this reason: the man who has never really taken a high place in our regard is unprovided with those sharpest weapons of provocation, which make unendurable demands on human fortitude. In a true attachment, on the other

hand, there is an innocent familiarity implied, which is forgetful of ceremony, and blind to consequences. The affectionate freedom which can speak kindly without effort is sensitive to offence, and can speak harshly without restraint. When the friend who wounds us has once been associated with the sacred memories of the heart, he strikes at a tender place, and no considerations of propriety are powerful enough to stifle our cry of rage and pain. The enemies who have once loved each other are the bitterest enemies of all.

Thus, the curt exchange of question and answer, which had taken place in the cottage at Passy, between two gentlemen artificially friendly to one another, led to no regrettable result. Lord Harry had been too readily angry: he remembered what was due to Mr. Mountjoy. Mr. Mountjoy had been too thoughtlessly abrupt: he remembered what was due to Lord Harry. The courteous

Irishman bowed, and pointed to a chair. The well-bred Englishman returned the polite salute, and sat down. My lord broke the silence that followed.

'May I hope that you will excuse me,' he began, 'if I walk about the room? Movement seems to help me when I am puzzled how to put things nicely. Sometimes I go round and round the subject, before I get at it. I'm afraid I'm going round and round, now. Have you arranged to make a long stay in Paris?'

Circumstances, Mountjoy answered, would probably decide him.

'You have no doubt been many times in Paris before this,' Lord Harry continued. 'Do you find it at all dull, now?'

Wondering what he could possibly mean, Hugh said he never found Paris dull—and waited for further enlightenment. The Irish lord persisted.

'People mostly think Paris isn't as gay as it used to be. Not such good plays and such good actors as they had at one time. The restaurants inferior, and society very much mixed. People don't stay there as long as they used. I'm told that Americans are getting disappointed, and are trying London for a change.'

Could he have any serious motive for this irrelevant way of talking? Or was he, to judge by his own account of himself, going round and round the subject of his wife and his guest, before he could get at it?

Suspecting him of jealousy from the first, Hugh failed—naturally perhaps in his position—to understand the regard for Iris, and the fear of offending her, by which her jealous husband was restrained. Lord Harry was attempting (awkwardly indeed!) to break off the relations between his wife and her friend, by means which might keep the true state of

his feelings concealed from both of them. Ignorant of this claim on his forbearance, it was Mountjoy's impression that he was being trifled with. Once more he waited for enlightenment, and waited in silence.

'You don't find my conversation interesting?' Lord Harry remarked, still with perfect good humour.

'I fail to see the connection,' Mountjoy acknowledged, 'between what you have said so far, and the subject on which you expressed your intention of speaking to me. Pray forgive me if I appear to hurry you—or if you have any reasons for hesitation.'

Far from being offended, this incomprehensible man really appeared to be pleased. 'You read me like a book!' he exclaimed. 'It's hesitation that's the matter with me. I'm a variable man. If there's something disagreeable to say, there are times when I dash at it, and times when I hang back. Can I

offer you any refreshment?' he asked, getting away from the subject again, without so much as an attempt at concealment.

Hugh thanked him, and declined.

'Not even a glass of wine? Such white Burgundy, my dear sir, as you seldom taste.'

Hugh's British obstinacy was roused; he repeated his reply. Lord Harry looked at him gravely, and made a nearer approach to an open confession of feeling than he had ventured on yet.

'With regard now to my wife. When I went away this morning with Vimpany—he's not such good company as he used to be; soured by misfortune, poor devil; I wish he would go back to London. As I was saying—I mean as I was about to say—I left you and Lady Harry together this morning; two old friends, glad (as I supposed) to have a gossip about old times. When I come back, I find you left here alone, and I am told that

Lady Harry is in her room. What do I see when I get there? I see the finest pair of eyes in the world; and the tale they tell me is, We have been crying. When I ask what may have happened to account for this—"Nothing, dear," is all the answer I get. What's the impression naturally produced on my mind? There has been a quarrel perhaps between you and my wife.'

'I fail entirely, Lord Harry, to see it in that light.'

'Ah, likely enough! Mine's the Irish point of view. As an Englishman you fail to understand it. Let that be. One thing, Mr. Mountjoy, I'll take the freedom of saying at once. I'll thank you, next time, to quarrel with Me.'

'You force me to tell you, my lord, that you are under a complete delusion, if you suppose that there has been any quarrel, or

approach to a quarrel, between Lady Harry and myself.'

'You tell me that on your word of honour as a gentleman?'

'Most assuredly!'

'Sir! I deeply regret to hear it.'

'Which does your lordship deeply regret? That I have spoken to you on my word of honour, or that I have not quarrelled with Lady Harry?'

'Both, sir! By the piper that played before Moses, both!'

Hugh got up, and took his hat: 'We may have a better chance of understanding each other,' he suggested, 'if you will be so good as to write to me.'

'Put your hat down again, Mr. Mountjoy, and pray have a moment's patience. I've tried to like you, sir—and I'm bound in candour to own that I've failed to find a bond of

union between us. Maybe, this frank confession annoys you.'

'Far from it! You are going straight to your subject, at last, if I may venture to say so.'

The Irish lord's good-humour had completely disappeared by this time. His handsome face hardened, and his voice rose. The outbreak of jealous feeling, which motives honourable to himself had hitherto controlled, now seized on its freedom of expression. His language betrayed (as on some former occasions) that association with unworthy companions, which had been one of the evil results of his adventurous life.

'Maybe I'll go straighter than you bargain for,' he replied; 'I'm in two humours about you. My common sense tells me that you're my wife's friend. And the best of friends do sometimes quarrel, don't they? Well, sir! you deny it, on your own account. I find myself forced back on my other humour, and

it's a black humour I can tell you. You may be my wife's friend, my fine fellow, but you're something more than that. You have always been in love with her—and you're in love with her now. Thank you for your visit, but don't repeat it. Say! do we understand each other at last?'

'I have too sincere a respect for Lady Harry to answer you,' Mountjoy said. 'At the same time, let me acknowledge my obligations to your lordship. You have reminded me that I did a foolish thing when I called here without an invitation. I agree with you that the sooner my mistake is set right the better.'

He replied in those words, and left the cottage.

On the way back to his hotel, Hugh thought of what Mrs. Vimpany had said to him when they had last seen each other: 'Don't forget that there is an obstacle between

you and Iris which will put even your patience and your devotion to a hard trial.' The obstacle of the husband had set itself up, and had stopped him already.

His own act (a necessary act after the language that had been addressed to him) had closed the doors of the cottage, and had put an end to future meetings between Iris and himself. If they attempted to communicate by letter, Lord Harry would have opportunities of discovering their correspondence, of which his jealousy would certainly avail itself. Through the wakeful night, Hugh's helpless situation was perpetually in his thoughts. There seemed to be no present alternative before him but resignation, and a return to England.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SCHOOL FOR HUSBANDS

ON the next day Mountjoy heard news of Iris which was not of a nature to relieve his anxieties. He received a visit from Fanny Mere.

The leave-taking of Mr. Vimpany, on the previous evening, was the first event which the maid had to relate. She had been present when the doctor said good-bye to the master and mistress. Business in London was the reason he gave for going away. The master had taken the excuse as if he really believed in it, and seemed to be glad to get rid of his friend. The mistress expressed her opinion that Mr. Vimpany's return to London

must have been brought about by an act of liberality on the part of the most generous of living men. '*Your* friend has, as I believe, got some money from *my* friend,' she said to her husband. My lord had looked at her very strangely when she spoke of Mr. Mountjoy in that way, and had walked out of the room. As soon as his back was turned, Fanny had obtained leave of absence. She had carried out her intention of watching the terminus, and had seen Mr. Vimpany take his place among the passengers to London by the mail train.

Returning to the cottage, it was Fanny's duty to ascertain if her services were required in her mistress's room.

On reaching the door, she had heard the voices of my lord and my lady, and (as Mr. Mountjoy would perhaps be pleased to know) had been too honourable to listen outside, on this occasion. She had at once gone away,

and had waited until she should be sent for. After a long interval, the bell that summoned her had been rung. She had found the mistress in a state of agitation, partly angry, and partly distressed; and had ventured to ask if anything unpleasant had happened. No reply was made to that inquiry. Fanny had silently performed the customary duties of the night-toilet, in getting my lady ready for bed; they had said good-night to each other, and had said no more.

In the morning (that present morning), being again in attendance as usual, the maid had found Lady Harry in a more indulgent frame of mind; still troubled by anxieties, but willing to speak of them now.

She had begun by talking of Mr. Mountjoy:

'I think you like him, Fanny: everybody likes him. You will be sorry to hear that we have no prospect of seeing him again

at the cottage.' There she had stopped; something that she had not said, yet, seemed to be in her mind, and to trouble her. She was near to crying, poor soul, but struggled against it. 'I have no sister,' she said, 'and no friend who might be like a sister to me. It isn't perhaps quite right to speak of my sorrow to my maid. Still, there is something hard to bear in having no kind heart near one —I mean, no other woman to speak to who knows what women feel. It is so lonely here —oh, so lonely! I wonder whether you understand me and pity me?' Never forgetting all that she owed to her mistress—if she might say so without seeming to praise herself —Fanny was truly sorry. It would have been a relief to her, if she could have freely expressed her opinion that my lord must be to blame, when my lady was in trouble. Being a man, he was by nature cruel to women; the wisest thing his poor wife could do would

be to expect nothing from him. The maid was sorely tempted to offer a little good advice to this effect; but she was afraid of her own remembrances, if she encouraged them by speaking out boldly. It would be better to wait for what the mistress might say next.

Lord Harry's conduct was the first subject that presented itself when the conversation was resumed.

My lady mentioned that she had noticed how he looked, and how he left the room when she had spoken in praise of Mr. Mountjoy. She had pressed him to explain himself —and she had made a discovery which proved to be the bitterest disappointment of her life. Her husband suspected her! Her husband was jealous of her! It was too cruel; it was an insult beyond endurance, an insult to Mr. Mountjoy as well as to herself. If that best and dearest of good friends was to be for-

bidden the house, if he was to go away and never to see her or speak to her again, of one thing she was determined—he should not leave her without a kind word of farewell; he should hear how truly she valued him; yes, and how she admired and felt for him! Would Fanny not do the same thing, in her place? And Fanny had remembered the time when she might have done it for such a man as Mr. Mountjoy. 'Mind you stay indoors this evening, sir,' the maid continued, looking and speaking so excitedly that Hugh hardly knew her again. 'My mistress is coming to see you, and I shall come with her.'

Such an act of imprudence was incredible. 'You must be out of your senses!' Mountjoy exclaimed.

'I'm out of myself, sir, if that's what you mean,' Fanny answered. 'I do so enjoy treating a man in that way! The master's going out to dinner—he'll know nothing

about it—and,' cried the cool cold woman of other times, 'he richly deserves it!'

Hugh reasoned and remonstrated, and failed to produce the slightest effect.

His next effort was to write a few lines to Lady Harry, entreating her to remember that a jealous man is sometimes capable of acts of the meanest duplicity, and that she might be watched. When he gave the note to Fanny to deliver, she informed him respectfully that he had better not trust her. A person sometimes meant to do right (she reminded him), and sometimes ended in doing wrong. Rather than disappoint her mistress, she was quite capable of tearing up the letter, on her way home, and saying nothing about it. Hugh tried a threat next: 'Your mistress will not find me, if she comes here; I shall go out to-night.' The impenetrable maid looked at him with a pitying smile and answered: 'Not you!'

It was a humiliating reflection—but Fanny Mere understood him better than he understood himself.

All that Mountjoy had said and done in the way of protest had been really dictated by consideration for the young wife. If he questioned his conscience, selfish delight in the happy prospect of seeing Iris again asserted itself as the only view with which he looked forward to the end of the day. When the evening approached, he took the precaution of having his own discreet and faithful servant in attendance, to receive Lady Harry at the door of the hotel, before the ringing of the bell could summon the porter from his lodge. On calm consideration, the chances seemed to be in favour of her escaping detection by Lord Harry. The jealous husband of the stage, who sooner (or later) discovers the innocent (or guilty) couple, as the case may be, is not always the husband of the world outside

the theatre. With this fragment of experience present in his mind, Hugh saw the door of his sitting-room cautiously opened, at an earlier hour than he had anticipated. His trustworthy representative introduced a lady, closely veiled—and that lady was Iris.

CHAPTER XXXII

GOOD-BYE TO IRIS

LADY HARRY lifted her veil, and looked at Mountjoy with sad entreaty in her eyes. 'Are you angry with me?' she asked.

'I ought to be angry with you,' he said. 'This is very imprudent, Iris.'

'It's worse than that,' she confessed. 'It's reckless and desperate. Don't say I ought to have controlled myself. I can't control the shame I feel when I think of what has happened. Can I let you go—oh, what a return for your kindness—without taking your hand at parting? Come and sit by me on the sofa. After my poor husband's conduct, you and I

are not likely to meet again. I don't expect you to lament it as I do. Even your sweetness and your patience—so often tried—must be weary of me now.'

'If you thought that possible, my dear, you would not have come here to-night,' Hugh reminded her. 'While we live we have the hope of meeting again. Nothing in this world lasts, Iris—not even jealousy. Lord Harry himself told me that he was a variable man. Sooner or later he will come to his senses.'

Those words seemed to startle Iris. 'I hope you don't think that my husband is brutal to me!' she exclaimed, still resenting even the appearance of a reflection on her marriage, and still forgetting what she herself had said which justified a doubt of her happiness. 'Have you formed a wrong impression?' she went on. 'Has Fanny Mere innocently——?'

Mountjoy noticed, for the first time, the

absence of the maid. It was a circumstance which justified him in interrupting Iris—for it might seriously affect her if her visit to the hotel happened to be discovered.

'I understood,' he said, 'that Fanny was to come here with you.'

'Yes! yes! She is waiting in the carriage. We are careful not to excite attention at the door of the hotel: the coachman will drive up and down the street till I want him again. Never mind that! I have something to say to you about Fanny. She thinks of her own troubles, poor soul, when she talks of me, and exaggerates a little without meaning it. I hope she has not misled you in speaking of her master. It is base and bad of him, unworthy of a gentleman, to be jealous—and he has wounded me deeply. But, dear Hugh, his jealousy is a gentle jealousy. I have heard of other men who watch their wives—who have lost all confidence in them—who

would even have taken away from me such a trifle as this.' She smiled, and showed to Mountjoy her duplicate key of the cottage door. 'Ah, Harry is above such degrading distrust as that! There are times when he is as heartily ashamed of his own weakness as I could wish him to be. I have seen him on his knees before me, shocked at his conduct. He is no hypocrite. Indeed, his repentance is sincere, while it lasts—only it doesn't last! His jealousy rises and falls, like the wind. He said last night (when the wind was high): "If you wish to make me the happiest creature on the face of the earth, don't encourage Mr. Mountjoy to remain in Paris!" Try to make allowances for him!'

'I would rather make allowances, Iris, for you. Do *you* too wish me to leave Paris?'

Sitting very near to him—nearer than her husband might have liked to see—Iris drew away a little. 'Did you mean to be cruel, in

saying that?' she asked. 'I don't deserve it.'

'It was kindly meant,' Hugh assured her. 'If I can make your position more endurable by going away, I will leave Paris to-morrow.'

Iris moved back again to the place which she had already occupied. She was eager to thank him (for a reason not yet mentioned) as she had never thanked him yet. Silently and softly she offered her gratitude to Hugh by offering her cheek. The irritating influence of Lord Harry's jealousy was felt by both of them at that moment. He kissed her cheek—and lingered over it. She was the first to recover herself.

'When you spoke just now of my position with my husband,' she said, 'you reminded me of anxieties, Hugh, in which you once shared, and of services which I can never forget.'

Preparing him in those words for the dis-

closure which she had now to make, Iris alluded to the vagabond life of adventure which Lord Harry had led. The restlessness in his nature which that life implied had latterly shown itself again; and his wife had traced the cause to a letter from Ireland, communicating a report that the assassin of Arthur Mountjoy had been seen in London, and was supposed to be passing under the name of Carrigeen. Hugh would understand that the desperate resolution to revenge the murder of his friend, with which Lord Harry had left England in the past time, had been urged into action once more. He had not concealed from Iris that she must be resigned to his leaving her for awhile, if the report which had reached him from Ireland proved to be true. It would be useless, and worse than useless, to remind this reckless man of the danger that threatened him from the Invincibles, if he returned to England. In

using her power of influencing the husband who still loved her, Iris could only hope to exercise a salutary restraint in her own domestic interests, appealing to him for indulgence by careful submission to any exactions on which his capricious jealousy might insist. Would sad necessity excuse her, if she accepted Mountjoy's offer to leave Paris, for the one reason that her husband had asked it of her as a favour?

Hugh at once understood her motive, and assured her of his sympathy.

'You may depend upon my returning to London to-morrow,' he said. 'In the meantime, is there no better way in which I can be of use to you? If your influence fails, do you see any other chance of keeping Lord Harry's desperate purpose under control?'

It had only occurred that day to Iris that there might be some prospect of an encourag-

ing result, if she could obtain the assistance of Mrs. Vimpany.

The doctor's wife was well acquainted with Lord Harry's past life, when he happened to be in Ireland; and she had met many of his countrymen with whom he had associated. If one of those friends happened to be the officious person who had written to him, it was at least possible that Mrs. Vimpany's discreet interference might prevent his mischievous correspondent from writing again. Lord Harry, waiting for more news, would in this event wait in vain. He would not know where to go, or what to do next—and, with such a nature as his, the end of his patience and the end of his resolution were likely to come together.

Hugh handed his pocket-book to Iris. Of the poor chances in her favour, the last was to his mind the least hopeless of the two.

'If you have discovered the name of your

husband's correspondent,' he said, 'write it down for me, and I will ask Mrs. Vimpany if she knows him. I will make your excuses for not having written to her lately; and, in any case, I answer for her being ready to help you.'

As Iris thanked him and wrote the name, the clock on the chimney-piece struck the hour.

She rose to say farewell. With a restless hand she half-lowered her veil, and raised it again. 'You won't mind my crying,' she said faintly, trying to smile through her tears. 'This is the saddest parting I have ever known. Dear, dear Hugh—good-bye!'

Great is the law of Duty; but the elder law of Love claims its higher right. Never, in all the years of their friendship, had they forgotten themselves as they forgot themselves now. For the first time her lips met his lips, in their farewell kiss. In a moment

more, they remembered the restraints which honour imposed on them; they were only friends again. Silently she lowered her veil. Silently he took her arm and led her down to the carriage. It was moving away from them at a slow pace, towards the other end of the street. Instead of waiting for its return, they followed and overtook it. 'We shall meet again,' he whispered. She answered sadly: 'Don't forget me.'

Mountjoy turned back. As he approached the hotel he noticed a tall man crossing from the opposite side of the street. Not two minutes after Iris was on her way home, her jealous husband and her old friend met at the hotel door.

Lord Harry spoke first. 'I have been dining out,' he said, 'and I came here to have a word with you, Mr. Mountjoy, on my road home.'

Hugh answered with formal politeness:

'Let me show your lordship the way to my rooms.'

'Oh, it's needless to trouble you,' Lord Harry declared. 'I have so little to say—do you mind walking on with me for a few minutes?'

Mountjoy silently complied. He was thinking of what might have happened if Iris had delayed her departure—or if the movement of the carriage had been towards, instead of away from, the hotel. In either case it had been a narrow escape for the wife, from a dramatic discovery by the husband.

'We Irishmen,' Lord Harry resumed, 'are not famous for always obeying the laws; but it is in our natures to respect the law of hospitality. When you were at the cottage yesterday I was inhospitable to my guest. My rude behaviour has weighed on my mind since—and for that reason I have come here to speak to you. It was ill-bred on my

part to reproach you with your visit, and to forbid you (oh, quite needlessly, I don't doubt!) to call on me again. If I own that I have no desire to propose a renewal of friendly intercourse between us, you will understand me, I am sure; with my way of thinking the less we see of each other for the future, the better it may be. But, for what I said when my temper ran away with me, I ask you to accept my excuses, and the sincere expression of my regret.'

'Your excuses are accepted, my lord, as sincerely as you have offered them,' Mountjoy answered. 'So far as I am concerned, the incident is forgotten from this moment.'

Lord Harry expressed his courteous acknowledgments. 'Spoken as becomes a gentleman,' he said. 'I thank you.'

There it ended. They saluted each other: they wished each other good-night. 'A mere

formality!' Hugh thought, when they had parted.

He had wronged the Irish lord in arriving at that conclusion. But time was to pass before events helped him to discover his error.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DECREE OF FATE

ON his arrival in London, Mountjoy went to the Nurses' Institute to inquire for Mrs. Vimpany.

She was again absent, in attendance on another patient. The address of the house (known only to the matron) was, on this occasion not to be communicated to any friend who

might make inquiries. A bad case of scarlet fever had been placed under the nurse's care, and the danger of contagion was too serious to be trifled with.

The events which had led to Mrs. Vimpany's present employment had not occurred in the customary course.

A nurse who had recently joined the Institute had been first engaged to undertake the case, at the express request of the suffering person—who was said to be distantly related to the young woman. On the morning when she was about to proceed to the scene of her labours, news had reached her of the dangerous illness of her mother. Mrs. Vimpany, who was free at the time, and who felt a friendly interest in her young colleague, volunteered to take her place. Upon this, a strange request had been addressed to the matron, on behalf of the sick man. He desired to be 'informed of it, if the new nurse

was an Irishwoman.' Hearing that she was an Englishwoman, he at once accepted her services; being himself (as an additional element of mystery in the matter) an Irishman!

The matron's English prejudices at once assumed that there had been some discreditable event in the man's life, which might be made a subject of scandalous exposure, if he was attended by one of his own country-people. She advised Mrs. Vimpany to have nothing to do with the afflicted stranger. The nurse answered that she had promised to attend on him—and she kept her promise.

Mountjoy left the Institute, after vainly attempting to obtain Mrs. Vimpany's address. The one concession which the matron offered to make was to direct his letter, and send it to the post, if he would be content with that form of communication.

On reflection, he decided to write the letter.

Prompt employment of time might be of importance, if it was possible to prevent any further communication with Lord Harry, on the part of his Irish correspondent. Using the name with which Iris had provided him, Hugh wrote to inquire if it was familiar to Mrs. Vimpany, as the name of a person with whom she had been, at any time, acquainted. In this event he assured her that an immediate consultation between them was absolutely necessary in the interests of Iris. He added, in a postscript, that he was in perfect health, and that he had no fear of infection —and sent his letter to the matron to be forwarded.

The reply reached him late in the evening. It was in the handwriting of a stranger, and was to this effect:

'Dear Mr. Mountjoy,—It is impossible that I can allow you to run the risk of seeing me, while I am in my present situation. So

serious is the danger of contagion, in scarlet fever, that I dare not even write to you with my own hand, on note-paper which has been used in the sick-room. This is no mere fancy of mine; the doctor in attendance here knows of a case in which a small piece of infected flannel communicated the disease after an interval of no less than a year. I must trust to your own good sense to see the necessity of waiting, until I can receive you without any fear of consequences to yourself. In the meantime, I may answer your inquiry, relating to the name communicated in your letter. I first knew the gentleman you mention some years since; we were introduced to each other by Lord Harry; and I saw him afterwards on more than one occasion.'

Mountjoy read this wise and considerate reply to his letter with indignation.

Here was the good fortune for which he had not dared to hope, declaring itself in

favour of Iris. Here (if Mrs. Vimpany could be persuaded to write to her friend) was the opportunity offered of keeping the hot-tempered Irish husband passive and harmless, by keeping him without further news of the assassin of Arthur Mountjoy. Under these encouraging circumstances, the proposed consultation which might have produced such excellent results had been rejected; thanks to a contemptible fear of infection, excited by a story of a trumpery piece of flannel!

Hugh snatched up the unfortunate letter (cast away on the floor) to tear it in pieces, and throw it into the waste-paper basket—and checked himself. His angry hand had seized on it with the blank leaf of the note-paper uppermost.

On that leaf he discovered two little lines of print, presenting, in the customary form, the address of the house at which the letter had been written! The writer, in taking the

sheet of paper from the case, must have accidentally turned it wrong side uppermost on the desk, and had not cared to re-copy the letter, or had not discovered the mistake. Restored to his best good-humour, Hugh resolved to surprise Mrs. Vimpany by a visit, on the next day, which would set the theory of contagion at defiance, and render valuable service to Iris at a crisis in her life.

Having time before him for reflection, in the course of the evening, he was at no loss to discover a formidable obstacle in the way of his design.

Whether he gave his name or concealed his name, when he asked for Mrs. Vimpany at the house-door, she would in either case refuse to see him. The one accessible person whom he could consult in this difficulty was his faithful old servant.

That experienced man—formerly employed, at various times, in the army, in the

police, and in service at a public school—obtained leave to make some preliminary investigations on the next morning.

He achieved two important discoveries. In the first place, Mrs. Vimpany was living in the house in which the letter to his master had been written. In the second place, there was a page attached to the domestic establishment (already under notice to leave his situation), who was accessible to corruption by means of a bribe. The boy would be on the watch for Mr. Mountjoy at two o'clock on that day, and would show him where to find Mrs. Vimpany, in the room near the sick man, in which she was accustomed to take her meals.

Hugh acted on his instructions, and found the page waiting to admit him secretly to the house. Leading the way upstairs, the boy pointed with one hand to a door on the second-floor, and held out the other hand to

receive his money. While he pocketed the bribe, and disappeared, Mountjoy opened the door.

Mrs. Vimpany was seated at a table waiting for her dinner. When Hugh showed himself she started to her feet with a cry of alarm.

'Are you mad!' she exclaimed. 'How did you get here? What do you want here? Don't come near me!'

She attempted to pass Hugh on her way out of the room. He caught her by the arm, led her back to her chair, and forced her to seat herself again. 'Iris is in trouble,' he pleaded, 'and you can help her.'

'The fever!' she cried, heedless of what he had said. 'Keep back from me—the fever!'

For the second time she tried to get out of the room. For the second time Hugh stopped her.

'Fever or no fever,' he persisted, 'I have

something to say to you. In two minutes I shall have said it, and I will go.'

In the fewest possible words he described the situation of Iris with her jealous husband. Mrs. Vimpany indignantly interrupted him.

'Are you running this dreadful risk,' she asked, 'with nothing to say to me that I don't know already? Her husband jealous of her? Of course he is jealous of her! Leave me—or I will ring for the servant.'

'Ring, if you like,' Hugh answered; 'but hear this first. My letter to you alluded to a consultation between us, which might be necessary in the interests of Iris. Imagine her situation if you can! The assassin of Arthur Mountjoy is reported to be in London; and Lord Harry has heard of it.'

Mrs. Vimpany looked at him with horror in her eyes.

'Gracious God!' she cried, 'the man is here—under my care. Oh, I am not in the

conspiracy to hide the wretch! I knew no more of him than you do when I offered to nurse him. The names that have escaped him, in his delirium, have told me the truth.'

As she spoke, a second door in the room was opened. An old woman showed herself for a moment, trembling with terror. 'He's breaking out again, nurse! Help me to hold him!'

Mrs. Vimpany instantly followed the woman into the bedroom. 'Wait and listen,' she said to Mountjoy—and left the door open.

The quick, fierce, muttering tones of a man in delirium were now fearfully audible. His maddened memory was travelling back over his own horrible life. He put questions to himself; he answered himself:

'Who drew the lot to kill the traitor? I did! I did! Who shot him on the road, before he could get to the wood? I did! I did!

Arthur Mountjoy, traitor to Ireland. Set that on his tombstone, and disgrace him for ever. Listen, boys—listen! There is a patriot among you. I am the patriot—preserved by a merciful Providence. Ha, my Lord Harry, search the earth and search the sea, the patriot is out of your reach! Nurse! What's that the doctor said of me? The fever will kill him? Well, what does that matter, as long as Lord Harry doesn't kill me? Open the doors, and let everybody hear of it. I die the death of a saint—the greatest of all saints—the saint who shot Arthur Mountjoy. Oh, the heat, the heat, the burning raging heat!' The tortured creature burst into a dreadful cry of rage and pain. It was more than Hugh's resolution could support. He hurried out of the house.

. . . . .

Ten days passed. A letter, in a strange handwriting, reached Iris at Passy.

The first part of the letter was devoted to the Irish desperado, whom Mrs. Vimpany had attended in his illness.

When she only knew him as a suffering fellow-creature she had promised to be his nurse. Did the discovery that he was an assassin justify desertion, or even excuse neglect? No! the nursing art, like the healing art, is an act of mercy—in itself too essentially noble to inquire whether the misery that it relieves merits help. All that experience, all that intelligence, all that care could offer, the nurse gave to the man whose hand she would have shrunk from touching in friendship, after she had saved his life.

A time had come when the fever threatened to take Lord Harry's vengeance out of his hands. The crisis of the disease declared itself. With the shadow of death on him, the wretch lived through it—saved by his strong constitution, and by the skilled and

fearless woman who attended on him. At the period of his convalescence, friends from Ireland (accompanied by a medical man of their own choosing) presented themselves at the house, and asked for him by the name under which he passed—Carrigeen. With every possible care, he was removed; to what destination had never been discovered. From that time, all trace of him had been lost.

Terrible news followed on the next page.

The subtle power of infection had asserted itself against the poor mortal who had defied it. Hugh Mountjoy, stricken by the man who had murdered his brother, lay burning under the scarlet fire of the fever.

But the nurse watched by him, night and day.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MY LORD'S MIND

HERE, my old-vagabond-Vimpany, is an interesting case for you—the cry of a patient with a sick mind. Look over it, and prescribe for your wild Irish friend, if you can.

You will perhaps remember that I have never thoroughly trusted you, in all the years since we have known each other. At this later date in our lives, when I ought to see more clearly than ever what an unfathomable man you are, am I rash enough to be capable of taking you into my confidence?

I don't know what I am going to do; I feel like a man who has been stunned. To be

told that the murderer of Arthur Mountjoy had been seen in London—to be prepared to trace him by his paltry assumed name of Carrigeen—to wait vainly for the next discovery which might bring him within reach of retribution at my hands—and then to be overwhelmed by the news of his illness, his recovery, and his disappearance: these are the blows which have stupefied me. Only think of it! He has escaped me for the second time. Fever that kills thousands of harmless creatures has spared the assassin. He may yet die in his bed, and be buried, with the guiltless dead around him, in a quiet churchyard. I can't get over it; I shall never get over it.

Add to this, anxieties about my wife, and maddening letters from creditors—and don't expect me to write reasonably.

What I want to know is whether your art (or whatever you call it) can get at my

diseased mind, through my healthy body? You have more than once told me that medicine can do this. The time has come for doing it. I am in a bad way, and a bad end may follow. My only medical friend, deliver me from myself.

In any case, let me beg you to keep your temper while you read what follows.

I have to confess that the devil whose name is Jealousy has entered into me, and is threatening the tranquillity of my married life. You dislike Iris, I know—and she returns your hostile feeling towards her. Try to do my wife justice, nevertheless, as I do. I don't believe my distrust of her has any excuse—and yet I am jealous. More unreasonable still, I am as fond of her as I was in the first days of the honeymoon. Is she as fond as ever of me? You were a married man when I was a boy. Let me give you the means of forming an opinion by a narrative of her conduct,

under (what I admit to have been) very trying circumstances.

When the first information reached Iris of Hugh Mountjoy's dangerous illness, we were at breakfast. It struck her dumb. She handed the letter to me, and left the table.

I hate a man who doesn't know what it is to want money; I hate a man who keeps his temper; I hate a man who pretends to be my wife's friend, and who is secretly in love with her all the time. What difference did it make to me whether Hugh Mountjoy ended in living or dying? If I had any interest in the matter it ought by rights (seeing that I am jealous of him) to be an interest in his death. Well! I declare positively that the alarming news from London spoilt my breakfast! There is something about that friend of my wife—that smug, prosperous, well-behaved Englishman—which seems to plead for him (God knows how!) when my mind is least inclined in his favour.

While I was reading about his illness, I found myself hoping that he would recover—and, I give you my sacred word of honour, I hated him all the time!

My Irish friend is mad—you will say. Your Irish friend, my dear fellow, does not dispute it.

Let us get back to my wife. She showed herself again after a long absence, having something (at last) to say to her husband.

'I am innocently to blame,' she began, 'for the dreadful misfortune that has fallen on Mr. Mountjoy. If I had not given him a message to Mrs. Vimpany, he would never have insisted on seeing her, and would never have caught the fever. It may help me to bear my misery of self-reproach and suspense, if I am kept informed of his illness. There is no fear of infection by my receiving letters. I am to write to a friend of Mrs. Vimpany, who lives in another house, and who will answer

my inquiries. Do you object, dear Harry, to my getting news of Hugh Mountjoy every day, while he is in danger?'

I was perfectly willing that she should get that news, and she ought to have known it.

It seemed to me to be also a bad sign that she made her request with dry eyes. She must have cried, when she first heard that he was likely to sink under an attack of fever. Why were her tears kept hidden in her own room? When she came back to me, her face was pale and hard and tearless. Don't you think she might have forgotten my jealousy, when I was so careful myself not to show it? My own belief is that she was longing to go to London, and help your wife to nurse the poor man, and catch the fever, and die with him if *he* died.

Is this bitter? Perhaps it is. Tear it off, and light your pipe with it.

Well, the correspondence relating to the

sick man continued every day ; and every day —oh, Vimpany, another concession to my jealousy !—she handed the letters to me to read. I made excuses (we Irish are good at that if we are good at nothing else), and declined to read the medical reports. One morning, when she opened the letter of that day, there passed over her a change which is likely to remain in my memory as long as I live. Never have I seen such an ecstasy of happiness in any woman's face, as I saw when she read the lines which informed her that the fever was mastered. Iris is sweet and delicate and bright—essentially fascinating, in a word. But she was never a beautiful woman until she knew that Mountjoy's life was safe ; and she will never be a beautiful woman again unless the time comes when my death leaves her free to marry him. On her wedding-day he will see the transformation that I saw—and he will be dazzled as I was.

She looked at me, as if she expected me to speak.

'I am glad indeed,' I said, 'that he is out of danger.'

She ran to me—she kissed me; I wouldn't have believed it was in her to give such kisses. 'Now I have your sympathy,' she said, 'my happiness is complete!' Do you think I was indebted for those kisses to myself, or to that other man? No, no—here is an unworthy doubt. I discard it. Vile suspicion shall not wrong Iris this time.

And yet——

Shall I go on, and write the rest of it?

Poor, dear Arthur Mountjoy once told me of a foreign author, who was in great doubt of the right answer to some tough question that troubled him. He went into his garden and threw a stone at a tree. If he hit the tree, the answer would be—Yes. If he missed the tree, the answer would be—No.

I am going into the garden to imitate the foreign author. You shall hear how it ends.

I have hit the tree. As a necessary consequence, I must go on and write the rest of it.

There is a growing estrangement between Iris and myself—and my jealousy doesn't altogether account for it. Sometimes, it occurs to me that we are thinking of what our future relations with Mountjoy are likely to be, and are ashamed to confess it to each other. Sometimes—and perhaps this second, and easiest, guess may be the right one—I am apt to conclude that we are only anxious about money matters. I am waiting for her to touch on the subject, and she is waiting for me; and there we are at a deadlock.

I wish I had some reason for going to some other place. I wish I was lost among strangers. I should like to find myself in a state of danger, meeting the risks that I used to run in my vagabond days. Now I think of it, I

might enjoy this last excitement by going back to England, and giving the Invincibles a chance of shooting me as a traitor to the cause. But my wife would object to that.

Suppose we change the subject.

You will be glad to hear that you know something of law, as well as of medicine. I sent instructions to my solicitor in London to raise a loan on my life-insurance. What you said to me turns out to be right. I can't raise a farthing, for three years to come, out of all the thousands of pounds which I shall leave behind me when I die.

Are my prospects from the newspaper likely to cheer me after such a disappointment as this? The new journal, I have the pleasure of informing you, is much admired. When I inquire for my profits, I hear that the expenses are heavy, and I am told that I must wait for a rise in our circulation. How long? Nobody knows.

I shall keep these pages open for a few days more, on the chance of something happening which may alter my present position for the better.

My position has altered for the worse.

I have been obliged to fill my empty purse, for a little while, by means of a bit of stamped paper. And how shall I meet my liabilities when the Note falls due? Let time answer the question; for the present the evil day is put off. In the meanwhile, if that literary speculation of yours is answering no better than my newspaper, I can lend you a few pounds to get on with. What do you say (on second thoughts) to coming back to your old quarters at Passy, and giving me your valuable advice by word of mouth instead of by letter?

Come, and feel my pulse, and look at my tongue—and tell me how these various anxieties of mine are going to end, before we

are any of us a year older. Shall I, like you, be separated from my wife—at her request? oh, not at mine! Or shall I be locked up in prison? And what will become of You? Do you take the hint, doctor?

CHAPTER XXXV

MY LADY'S MIND

'ENTREAT Lady Harry not to write to me. She will be tempted to do so when she hears that there is good hope of Mr. Mountjoy's recovery. But, even from that

loving and generous heart, I must not accept expressions of gratitude which would only embarrass me. All that I have done, as a nurse, and all that I may yet hope to do, is no more than an effort to make amends for my past life. Iris has my heart's truest wishes for her happiness. Until I can myself write to her without danger, let this be enough.'

In those terms, dearest of women, your friend has sent your message to me. My love respects as well as admires you ; your wishes are commands to me. At the same time, I may find some relief from the fears of the future that oppress me, if I can confide them to friendly ears. May I not harmlessly write to you, if I only write of my own poor self?

Try, dear, to remember those pleasant days when you were staying with us, in our honeymoon time, at Paris.

You warned me one evening when we were alone, to be on my guard against any circumstances which might excite my husband's jealousy. Since then, the trouble that you foresaw has fallen on me; mainly, I am afraid, through my own want of self-control. It is so hard for a woman, when she really loves a man, to understand a state of mind which can make him doubt her.

I have discovered that jealousy varies. Let me tell you what I mean.

Lord Harry was silent and sullen (ah, how well I knew what that meant!) while the life of our poor Hugh was in jeopardy. When I read the good news which told me that he was no longer in danger, I don't know whether there was any change worth remarking in myself—but, there was a change in my husband, delightful to see. His face showed such sweet sympathy when he looked at me, he spoke so kindly and nicely of Hugh, that I

could only express my pleasure by kissing him. You will hardly believe me, when I tell you that his hateful jealousy appeared again at that moment. He looked surprised, he looked suspicious—he looked, I declare, as if he doubted whether I meant it with all my heart when I kissed him! What incomprehensible creatures men are! We read in novels of women who are able to manage their masters. I wish I knew how to manage mine.

We have been getting into debt. For some weeks past, this sad state of things has been a burden on my mind. Day after day I have been expecting him to speak of our situation, and have found him obstinately silent. Is his mind entirely occupied with other things? Or is he unwilling to speak of our anxieties because the subject humiliates him? Yesterday, I could bear it no longer.

'Our debts are increasing,' I said. 'Have you thought of any way of paying them?'

I had feared that my question might irritate him. To my relief, he seemed to be diverted by it.

'The payment of debts,' he replied, 'is a problem that I am too poor to solve. Perhaps I got near to it the other day.'

I asked how.

'Well,' he said, 'I found myself wishing I had some rich friends. By-the-by, how is *your* rich friend? What have you heard lately of Mr. Mountjoy?'

'I have heard that he is steadily advancing towards recovery.'

'Likely, I dare say, to return to France when he feels equal to it,' my husband remarked. 'He is a good-natured creature. If he finds himself in Paris again, I wonder whether he will pay us another visit?'

He said this quite seriously. On my side,

I was too much astonished to utter a word. My bewilderment seemed to amuse him. In his own pleasant way he explained himself:

'I ought to have told you, my dear, that I was in Mr. Mountjoy's company the night before he returned to England. We had said some disagreeable things to each other, here in the cottage, while you were away in your room. My tongue got the better of my judgment. In short, I spoke rudely to our guest. Thinking over it afterwards, I felt that I ought to make an apology. He received my sincere excuses with an amiability of manner, and a grace of language, which raised him greatly in my estimation.'

There you have Lord Harry's own words! Who would suppose that he had ever been jealous of the man whom he spoke of in this way?

I explain it to myself, partly by the charm

in Hugh's look and manner, which everybody feels; partly by the readiness with which my husband's variable nature receives new impressions. I hope you agree with me. In any case, pray let Hugh see what I have written to you in this place, and ask him what he thinks of it.[1]

Encouraged, as you will easily understand, by the delightful prospect of a reconciliation between them, I was eager to take my first opportunity of speaking freely of Hugh. Up to that time, it had been a hard trial to keep to myself so much that was deeply interesting in my thoughts and hopes. But my hours of disappointment were not at an end yet. We were interrupted.

A letter was brought to us—one of many, already received!—insisting on immediate payment of a debt that had been too long un-

[1] *Note by Mrs. Vimpany.*—I shall certainly not be foolish enough to show what she has written to Mr. Mountjoy. Poor deluded Iris! Miserable, fatal marriage!

settled. The detestable subject of our poverty insisted on claiming attention when there was a messenger outside, waiting for my poor Harry's last French bank note.

'What is to be done?' I said, when we were left by ourselves again.

My husband's composure was something wonderful. He laughed and lit a cigar.

'We have got to the crisis,' he said. 'The question of money has driven us into a corner at last. My darling, have you ever heard of such a thing as a promissory note?'

I was not quite so ignorant as he supposed me to be; I said I had heard my father speak of promissory notes.

This seemed to fail in convincing him. 'Your father,' he remarked, 'used to pay his notes when they fell due.'

I betrayed my ignorance, after all. 'Doesn't everybody do the same?' I asked.

He burst out laughing. 'We will send

the maid to get a bit of stamped paper,' he said; 'I'll write the message for her, this time.'

Those last words alluded to Fanny's ignorance of the French language, which made it necessary to provide her with written instructions, when she was sent on an errand. In our domestic affairs, I was able to do this; but, in the present case, I only handed the message to her. When she returned with a slip of stamped paper, Harry called to me to come to the writing-table.

'Now, my sweet,' he said, 'see how easily money is to be got with a scratch of the pen.'

I looked over his shoulder. In less than a minute it was done; and he had produced ten thousand francs on paper—in English money (as he told me), four hundred pounds. This seemed to be a large loan; I asked how he proposed to pay it back. He kindly reminded me that he was a newspaper pro-

prietor, and, as such, possessed of the means of inspiring confidence in persons with money to spare. They could afford, it seems, to give him three months in which to arrange for repayment. In that time, as he thought, the profits of the new journal might come pouring in. He knew best, of course.

We took the next train to Paris, and turned our bit of paper into notes and gold. Never was there such a delightful companion as my husband, when he has got money in his pocket. After so much sorrow and anxiety, for weeks past, that memorable afternoon was like a glimpse of Paradise.

On the next morning, there was an end to my short-lived enjoyment of no more than the latter half of a day.

Watching her opportunity, Fanny Mere came to me while I was alone, carrying a thick letter in her hand. She held it before me with the address uppermost.

'Please to look at that,' she said.

The letter was directed (in Harry's handwriting) to Mr. Vimpany, at a publishing office in London. Fanny next turned the envelope the other way.

'Look at this side,' she resumed.

The envelope was specially protected by a seal; bearing a device of my husband's own invention; that is to say, the initials of his name (Harry Norland) surmounted by a star —his lucky star, as he paid me the compliment of calling it, on the day when he married me. I was thinking of that day now. Fanny saw me looking, with a sad heart, at the impression on the wax. She completely misinterpreted the direction taken by my thoughts.

'Tell me to do it, my lady,' she proceeded; 'and I'll open the letter.'

I looked at her. She showed no confusion. 'I can seal it up again,' she coolly explained,

'with a bit of fresh wax and my thimble. Perhaps Mr. Vimpany won't be sober enough to notice it.'

'Do you know, Fanny, that you are making a dishonourable proposal to me?' I said.

'I know there's nothing I can do to help you that I won't do,' she answered; 'and you know why. I have made a dishonourable proposal—have I? That comes quite naturally to a lost woman like me. Shall I tell you what Honour means? It means sticking at nothing, in your service. Please tell me to open the letter.'

'How did you come by the letter, Fanny?'

'My master gave it to me to put in the post.'

'Then, post it.'

The strange creature, so full of contraries—so sensitive at one time, so impene-

trable at another—pointed again to the address.

'When the master writes to that man,' she went on—'a long letter (if you will notice), and a sealed letter—your ladyship ought to see what is inside it. I haven't a doubt myself that there's writing under this seal which bodes trouble to you. The spare bedroom is empty. Do you want to have the doctor for your visitor again? Don't tell me to post the letter, till I've opened it first.'

'I do tell you to post the letter.'

Fanny submitted, so far. But she had a new form of persuasion to try, before her reserves of resistance were exhausted. 'If the doctor comes back,' she continued, 'will your ladyship give me leave to go out, whenever I ask for it?'

This was surely presuming on my indulgence. 'Are you not expecting a little too much?' I suggested—not unkindly.

'If you say that, my lady,' she answered, 'I shall be obliged to ask you to suit yourself with another maid.'

There was a tone of dictation in this, which I found beyond endurance. In my anger, I said: 'Leave me whenever you like.'

'I shall leave you when I'm dead—not before,' was the reply that I received. 'But if you won't let me have my liberty without going away from you, for a time, I must go—for your sake.'

(For my sake! Pray observe that.)

She went on:

'Try to see it, my lady, as I do! If we have the doctor with us again, I must be able to watch him.'

'Why?'

'Because he is your enemy, as I believe.'

'How can he hurt me, Fanny?'

'Through your husband, my lady, if he

can do it in no other way. Mr. Vimpany shall have a spy at his heels. Dishonourable! oh, dishonourable again! Never mind. I don't pretend to know what that villain means to do, if he and my lord get together again. But this I can tell you, if it's in woman's wit to circumvent him, here I am with my mind made up. With my mind made up!' she repeated fiercely—and recovered on a sudden her customary character as a quiet well-trained servant, devoted to her duties. 'I'll take my master's letter to the post now,' she said. 'Is there anything your ladyship wants in the town?'

What do you think of Fanny Mere? Ought I to have treated this last offer of her services, as I treated her proposal to open the letter? I was not able to do it.

The truth is, I was so touched by her devotion to me, that I could not prevail on myself to mortify her by a refusal. I believe

there may be a good reason for the distrust of the doctor which possesses her so strongly; and I feel the importance of having this faithful and determined woman for an ally. Let me hope that Mr. Vimpany's return (if it is to take place) may be delayed until you can safely write, with your own hand, such a letter of wise advice as I sadly need.

In the meantime, give my love to Hugh, and say to this dear friend all that I might have said for myself, if I had been near him. But take care that his recovery is not retarded by anxiety for me. Pray keep him in ignorance of the doubts and fears with which I am now looking at the future. If I was not so fond of my husband, I should be easier in my mind. This sounds contradictory, but I believe you will understand it. For a while, my dear, good-bye.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DOCTOR MEANS MISCHIEF

ON the day after Lord Harry's description of the state of his mind reached London, a gentleman presented himself at the publishing office of Messrs. Boldside Brothers, and asked for the senior partner, Mr. Peter Boldside. When he sent in his card, it bore the name of 'Mr. Vimpany.'

'To what fortunate circumstance am I indebted, sir, for the honour of your visit?' the senior partner inquired. His ingratiating manners, his genial smile, his roundly resonant voice, were personal advantages of which he made a merciless use. The literary customer

who entered the office, hesitating before the question of publishing a work at his own expense, generally decided to pay the penalty when he encountered Mr. Peter Boldside.

'I want to inquire about the sale of my work,' Mr. Vimpany replied.

'Ah, doctor, you have come to the wrong man. You must go to my brother.'

Mr. Vimpany protested. 'You mentioned the terms when I first applied to you,' he said, 'and you signed the agreement.'

'That is in *my* department,' the senior partner gently explained. 'And I shall write the cheque when, as we both hope, your large profits shall fall due. But our sales of works are in the department of my brother, Mr. Paul Boldside.' He rang a bell; a clerk appeared, and received his instructions: 'Mr. Paul. Good-morning, doctor.'

Mr. Paul was, personally speaking, his brother repeated—without the deep voice,

and without the genial smile. Conducted to the office of the junior partner, Mr. Vimpany found himself in the presence of a stranger, occupied in turning over the pages of a newspaper. When his name was announced, the publisher started, and handed his newspaper to the doctor.

'This is a coincidence,' he said. 'I was looking, sir, for your name in the pages which I have just put into your hand. Surely the editor can't have refused to publish your letter?'

Mr. Vimpany was sober, and therefore sad, and therefore (again) not to be trifled with by a mystifying reception. 'I don't understand you,' he answered gruffly. 'What do you mean?'

'Is it possible that you have not seen last week's number of the paper?' Mr. Paul asked. 'And you a literary man!' He forthwith produced the last week's number, and opened

it at the right place. 'Read that, sir,' he said, with something in his manner which looked like virtuous indignation.

Mr. Vimpany found himself confronted by a letter addressed to the editor. It was signed by an eminent physician, whose portrait had appeared in the first serial part of the new work—accompanied by a brief memoir of his life, which purported to be written by himself. Not one line of the autobiography (this celebrated person declared) had proceeded from his pen. Mr. Vimpany had impudently published an imaginary memoir, full of false reports and scandalous inventions—and this after he had been referred to a trustworthy source for the necessary particulars. Stating these facts, the indignant physician cautioned readers to beware of purchasing a work which, so far as he was concerned, was nothing less than a fraud on the public.

'If you can answer that letter, sir,' Mr.

Paul Boldside resumed, 'the better it will be, I can tell you, for the sale of your publication.'

Mr. Vimpany made a reckless reply: 'I want to know how the thing sells. Never mind the letter.'

'Never mind the letter?' the junior partner repeated. 'A positive charge of fraud is advanced by a man at the head of his profession against a work which *we* have published—and you say, Never mind the letter.'

The rough customer of the Boldsides struck his fist on the table. 'Bother the letter! I insist on knowing what the sale is.'

Still preserving his dignity, Mr. Paul (like Mr. Peter) rang for the clerk, and briefly gave an order. 'Mr. Vimpany's account,' he said —and proceeded to admonish Mr. Vimpany himself.

'You appear, sir, to have no defence of your conduct to offer. Our firm has a repu-

tation to preserve. When I have consulted with my brother, we shall be under the disagreeable necessity——'

Here (as he afterwards told his brother) the publisher was brutally interrupted by the author:

'If you will have it,' said this rude man, 'here it is in two words. The doctor's portrait is the likeness of an ass. As he couldn't do it himself, I wanted materials for writing his life. He referred me to the year of his birth, the year of his marriage, the year of this, that, and the other. Who cares about dates? The public likes to be tickled by personal statements. Very well—I tickled the public. There you have it in a nutshell.'

The clerk appeared at that auspicious moment, with the author's account neatly exhibited under two sides: a Debtor side, which represented the expenditure of Hugh Mountjoy's money; and a Creditor side, which

represented (so far) Mr. Vimpany's profits. Amount of these last: 3*l.* 14*s.* 10*d.*

Mr. Vimpany tore up the account, threw the pieces in the face of Mr. Paul, and expressed his sentiments in one opprobrious word: 'Swindlers!'

The publisher said: 'You shall hear of us, sir, through our lawyer.'

And the author answered: 'Go to the devil!'

Once out in the streets again, the first open door at which Mr. Vimpany stopped was the door of a tavern. He ordered a glass of brandy and water, and a cigar.

It was then the hour of the afternoon, between the time of luncheon and the time of dinner, when the business of a tavern is generally in a state of suspense. The dining-room was empty when Mr. Vimpany entered it; and the waiter's unoccupied attention was

in want of an object. Having nothing else to notice, he looked at the person who had just come in. The deluded stranger was drinking fiery potato-brandy, and smoking (at the foreign price) an English cigar. Would his taste tell him the melancholy truth? No; it seemed to matter nothing to him what he was drinking or what he was smoking. Now he looked angry, and now he looked puzzled; and now he took a long letter from his pocket, and read it in places, and marked the places with a pencil. 'Up to some mischief,' was the waiter's interpretation of these signs. The stranger ordered a second glass of grog, and drank it in gulps, and fell into such deep thought that he let his cigar go out. Evidently, a man in search of an idea. And, to all appearance, he found what he wanted on a sudden. In a hurry he paid his reckoning, and left his small change and his unfinished cigar

on the table, and was off before the waiter could say 'Thank you.'

The next place at which he stopped was a fine house in a spacious square. A carriage was waiting at the door. The servant who opened the door knew him.

'Sir James is going out again, sir, in two minutes,' the man said. Mr. Vimpany answered: 'I won't keep him two minutes.'

A bell rang from the room on the ground floor; and a gentleman came out as Mr. Vimpany was shown in. Sir James's stethoscope was still in his hand; his latest medical fee lay on the table. 'Some other day, Vimpany,' the great surgeon said; 'I have no time to give you now.'

'Will you give me a minute?' the humble doctor asked.

'Very well. What is it?'

'I am down in the world now, Sir James,

as you know—and I am trying to pick myself up again.'

'Very creditable, my good fellow. How can I help you? Come, come—out with it. You want something?'

'I want your great name to do me a great service. I am going to France. A letter of introduction, from you, will open doors which might be closed to an unknown man like myself.'

'What doors do you mean?' Sir James asked.

'The doors of the hospitals in Paris.'

'Wait a minute, Vimpany. Have you any particular object in view?'

'A professional object of course,' the ready doctor answered. 'I have got an idea for a new treatment of diseases of the lungs; and I want to see if the French have made any recent discoveries in that direction.'

Sir James took up his pen—and hesitated. His ill-starred medical colleague had been his

fellow-student and his friend, in the days when they were both young men. They had seen but little of each other since they had gone their different ways—one of them, on the high road which leads to success, the other down the byways which end in failure. The famous surgeon felt a passing doubt of the use which his needy and vagabond inferior might make of his name. For a moment his pen was held suspended over the paper. But the man of great reputation was also a man of great heart. Old associations pleaded with him and won their cause. His companion of former times left the house provided with a letter of introduction to the chief surgeon at the Hôtel Dieu, in Paris.

Mr. Vimpany's next, and last, proceeding for that day, was to stop at a telegraph-office, and to communicate economically with Lord Harry in three words.

'Expect me to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FIRST QUARREL

EARLY in the morning of the next day, Lord Harry received the doctor's telegram. Iris not having risen at the time, he sent for Fanny Mere, and ordered her to get the spare room ready for a guest. The maid's busy suspicion tempted her to put a venturesome question. She asked if the person expected was a lady or a gentleman.

'What business is it of yours who the visitor is?' her master asked sharply. Always easy and good-humoured with his inferiors in general, Lord Harry had taken a dislike to his wife's maid, from the moment

when he had first seen her. His Irish feeling for beauty and brightness was especially offended by the unhealthy pallor of the woman's complexion, and the sullen self-suppression of her manner. All that his native ingenuity had been able to do was to make her a means of paying a compliment to his wife. 'Your maid has one merit, in my eyes,' he said; 'she is a living proof of the sweetness of your temper.'

Iris joined her husband at the breakfast-table with an appearance of disturbance in her face, seldom seen during the dull days of her life at Passy. 'I hear of somebody coming to stay with us,' she said. 'Not Mr. Vimpany again, I hope and trust?'

Lord Harry was careful to give his customary morning kiss, before he replied. 'Why shouldn't my faithful old friend come and see me again?' he asked, with his winning smile.

'Pray don't speak of that hateful man,' she answered, 'as your faithful old friend! He is nothing of the kind. What did you tell me when he took leave of us after his last visit, and I owned I was glad that he had gone? You said: "Faith, my dear, I'm as glad as you are."'

Her good-natured husband laughed at this little picture of himself. 'Ah, my darling, how many more times am I to make the same confession to my pretty priest? Try to remember, without more telling, that it's one of my misfortunes to be a man of many tempers. There are times when I get tired to death of Vimpany; and there are times when the cheery old devil exercises fascinations over me. I declare you're spoiling the eyebrows that I admire by letting them twist themselves into a frown! After the trouble I have taken to clear your mind of prejudice against an unfortunate man, it's

disheartening to find you so hard on the poor fellow's faults and so blind to his virtues.'

The time had been when this remonstrance might have influenced his wife's opinion. She passed it over without notice, now.

'Does he come here by your invitation?' she asked.

'How else should he come here, my dear?'

She looked at her husband with doubt too plainly visible in her eyes. 'I wonder what your motive is for sending for him,' she said.

He was just lifting his teacup to his lips —he put it down again when he heard those words.

'Are you ill this morning?' he asked.

'No.'

'Have I said anything that has offended you?'

'Certainly not.'

'Then I must tell you this, Iris; I don't approve of what you have just said. It sounds to my mind, unpleasantly like suspicion of me and suspicion of my friend. I see your face confessing it, my lady, at this moment.'

'You are half right, Harry, and no more. What you see in my face is suspicion of your friend.'

'Founded on what, if you please?'

'Founded on what I have seen of him, and on what I know of him. When you tried to alter my opinion of Mr. Vimpany some time since, I did my best to make my view your view. I deceived myself, for your sake; I put the best construction on what he said and did, when he was staying here. It was well meant, but it was of no use. In a thousand different ways, while he was doing his best to win my favour, his true self was

telling tales of him under the fair surface. Mr. Vimpany is a bad man. He is the very worst friend you could have about you at any time—and especially at a time when your patience is tried by needy circumstances.'

'One word, Iris. The more eloquent you are, the more I admire you. Only don't mention my needy circumstances again.'

She passed over the interruption as she had already passed over the remonstrance, without taking notice of it.

'Dearest, you are always good to me,' she continued gently. 'Am I wrong in thinking that love gives me some little influence over you still? Women are vain—are they not?—and I am no better than the rest of them. Flatter your wife's vanity, Harry, by attaching some importance to her opinion. Is there time enough, yet, to telegraph to Mr. Vimpany? Quite out of the question, is it? Well, then, if he must come here, do—

pray, pray do consider Me. Don't let him stay in the house! I'll find a good excuse, and take a bedroom for him in the neighbourhood. Anywhere else, so long as he is not here. He turns me cold when I think of him, sleeping under the same roof with ourselves. Not with *us*! oh, Harry, not with *us*!'

Her eyes eagerly searched her husband's face; she looked there for indulgence, she looked for conviction. No! he was still admiring her.

'On my word of honour,' he burst out, 'you fascinate me. What an imagination you have got! One of these days, Iris, I shall be prouder of you than ever; I shall find you a famous literary character. I don't mean writing a novel; women who can't even hem a handkerchief can write a novel. It's poetry I'm thinking of. Irish melodies by Lady Harry that beat Tom Moore. What a

gift! And there are fortunes made, as I have heard, by people who spoil fair white paper to some purpose. I wish I was one of them.'

'Have you no more to say to me?' she asked.

'What more should there be? You wouldn't have me take you seriously, in what you have just said of Vimpany?'

'Why not?'

'Oh, come, come, my darling! Just consider. With a bedroom empty and waiting, upstairs, is my old Vimpany to be sent to quarters for the night among strangers? I wouldn't speak harshly to you, Iris, for the whole world; and I don't deny that the convivial doctor may be sometimes a little too fond of his drop of grog. You will tell me, maybe, that he hasn't got on nicely with his wife; and I grant it. There are not many people who set such a pretty example of matrimony as we do. Poor humanity—there's

all that's to be said about it. But when you tell me that Vimpany is a bad man, and the worst friend I could possibly have, and so forth—what better can I do than set it down to your imagination? I've a pretty fancy, myself; and I think I see my angel inventing poetical characters, up among congenial clouds. What's the matter? Surely, you haven't done breakfast yet?'

'Yes.'

'Are you going to leave me?'

'I am going to my room.'

'You're in a mighty hurry to get away. I never meant to vex you, Iris. Ah, well, if you must leave the table, I'll have the honour of opening the door for you, at any rate. I wonder what you're going to do?'

'To cultivate my imagination,' she answered, with the first outbreak of bitterness that had escaped her yet.

His face hardened. 'There seems to be

something like bearing malice in this,' he said. 'Are you treating me, for the first time, to an exhibition of enmity? What am I to call it, if it's not that?'

'Call it disappointment,' she suggested quietly, and left him.

Lord Harry went back to his breakfast. His jealousy was up in arms again. 'She's comparing me with her absent friend,' he said to himself, 'and wishing she had married the amiable Mountjoy instead of me.'

So the first quarrel ended—and Mr. Vimpany had been the cause of it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ICI ON PARLE FRANÇAIS

THE doctor arrived in good time for dinner, and shook hands with the Irish lord in excellent spirits.

He looked round the room, and asked where my lady was. Lord Harry's reply suggested the presence of a cloud on the domestic horizon. He had been taking a long ride, and had only returned a few minutes since; Iris would (as he supposed) join them immediately.

The maid put the soup on the table, and delivered a message. Her mistress was suffering from headache, and was not well enough to dine with the gentlemen.

As an old married man, Mr. Vimpany knew what this meant; he begged leave to send a comforting message to the suffering lady of the house. Would Fanny be good enough to say that he had made inquiries on the subject of Mr. Mountjoy's health, before he left London. The report was still favourable; there was nothing to complain of but the after-weakness which had followed the fever. On that account only, the attendance of the nurse was still a matter of necessity. 'With my respects to Lady Harry,' he called after Fanny, as she went out in dogged silence.

'I have begun by making myself agreeable to your wife,' the doctor remarked with a self-approving grin. 'Perhaps she will dine with us to-morrow. Pass the sherry.'

The remembrance of what had happened at the breakfast-table, that morning, seemed to be dwelling disagreeably on Lord Harry's

mind. He said but little—and that little related to the subject on which he had already written, at full length, to his medical friend.

In an interval, when the service of the table required the attendance of Fanny in the kitchen, Mr. Vimpany took the opportunity of saying a few cheering words. He had come (he remarked) prepared with the right sort of remedy for an ailing state of mind, and he would explain himself at a fitter opportunity. Lord Harry impatiently asked why the explanation was deferred. If the presence of the maid was the obstacle which caused delay, it would be easy to tell her that she was not wanted to wait.

The wary doctor positively forbade this.

He had observed Fanny, during his previous visit, and had discovered that she seemed to distrust him. The woman was sly and suspicious. Since they had sat down to

dinner, it was easy to see that she was lingering in the room to listen to the conversation, on one pretence or another. If she was told not to wait, there could be no doubt of her next proceeding: she would listen outside the door. 'Take my word for it,' the doctor concluded, 'there are all the materials for a spy in Fanny Mere.'

But Lord Harry was obstinate. Chafing under the sense of his helpless pecuniary position, he was determined to hear, at once, what remedy for it Vimpany had discovered.

'We can set that woman's curiosity at defiance,' he said.

'How?'

'When you were learning your profession, you lived in Paris for some years, didn't you?'

'All right!'

'Well, then, you can't have entirely forgotten your French?'

The doctor at once understood what this meant, and answered significantly by a wink. He had found an opportunity (he said) of testing his memory, not very long since. Time had undoubtedly deprived him of his early mastery over the French language; but he could still (allowing for a few mistakes) make a shift to understand it and speak it. There was one thing, however, that he wanted to know first. Could they be sure that my lady's maid had not picked up French enough to use her ears to some purpose? Lord Harry easily disposed of this doubt. So entirely ignorant was the maid of the language of the place in which she was living, that she was not able to ask the tradespeople for the simplest article of household use, unless it was written for her in French before she was sent on an errand.

This was conclusive. When Fanny returned to the dining-room, she found a

surprise waiting for her. The two gentlemen had taken leave of their nationality, and were talking the language of foreigners.

An hour later, when the dinner-table had been cleared, the maid's domestic duties took her to Lady Harry's room to make tea. She noticed the sad careworn look on her mistress's face, and spoke of it at once in her own downright way.

'I thought it was only an excuse,' she said, 'when you gave me that message to the gentlemen, at dinner-time. Are you really ill, my lady?'

'I am a little out of spirits,' Iris replied.

Fanny made the tea. 'I can understand that,' she said to herself, as she moved away to leave the room; 'I'm out of spirits myself.'

Iris called her back: 'I heard you say just now, Fanny, that you were out of spirits yourself. If you were speaking of some

troubles of your own, I am sorry for you, and I won't say any more. But if you know what my anxieties are, and share them——'

'Mine is the biggest share of the two,' Fanny broke out abruptly. 'It goes against the grain with me to distress you, my lady; but we are beginning badly, and you ought to know it. The doctor has beaten me already.'

'Beaten you already?' Iris repeated. 'Tell me plainly what you mean?'

'Here it is, if you please, as plainly as words can say it. Mr. Vimpany has something—something wicked, of course—to say to my master; and he won't let it pass his lips here, in the cottage.'

'Why not?'

'Because he suspects me of listening at the door, and looking through the keyhole. I don't know, my lady, that he doesn't even suspect You. "I've learnt something in the course of my life," he says to my master; "and

it's a rule with me to be careful of what I talk about indoors, when there are women in the house. What are you going to do to-morrow?" he says. My lord told him there was to be a meeting at the newspaper office. The doctor says: "I'll go to Paris with you. The newspaper office isn't far from the Luxembourg Gardens. When you have done your business, you will find me waiting at the gate. What I have to tell you, you shall hear out of doors in the Gardens—and in an open part of them, too, where there are no lurking-places among the trees." My master seemed to get angry at being put off in this way. "What *is* it you have got to tell me?" he says. "Is it anything like the proposal you made, when you were on your last visit here?" The doctor laughed. "To-morrow won't be long in coming," he says. "Patience, my lord—patience." There was no getting him to say a word more. Now, what am I to

do? How am I to get a chance of listening to him, out in an open garden, without being seen? There's what I mean when I say he has beaten me. It's you, my lady—it's you who will suffer in the end.'

'You don't *know* that, Fanny.'

'No, my lady—but I'm certain of it. And here I am, as helpless as yourself! My temper has been quiet, since my misfortune; it would be quiet still, but for this.' The one animating motive, the one exasperating influence, in that sad and secret life was still the mistress's welfare—still the safety of the generous woman who had befriended and forgiven her. She turned aside from the table, to hide her ghastly face.

'Pray try to control yourself.' As Iris spoke she pointed kindly to a chair. 'There is something that I want to say when you are composed again. I won't hurry you; I won't look at you. Sit down, Fanny.'

She appeared to shrink from being seated in her mistress's presence. 'Please to let me go to the window,' she said; 'the air will help me.'

To the window she went, and struggled with the passionate self so steadily kept under at other times; so obstinately conquered now. 'What did you wish to say to me?' she asked.

'You have surprised—you have perplexed me,' Iris said. 'I am at a loss to understand how you discovered what seems to have passed between your master and Mr. Vimpany. You don't surely mean to tell me that they talked of their private affairs while you were waiting at table?'

'I don't tell lies, my lady,' Fanny declared impulsively. 'They talked of nothing else all through the dinner.'

'Before *you*!' Iris exclaimed.

There was a pause. Fear and shame con-

fessed themselves furtively on the maid's colourless face. Silently, swiftly, she turned to the door. Had a slip of the tongue hurried her into the betrayal of something which it was her interest to conceal? 'Don't be alarmed,' Iris said compassionately; 'I have no wish to intrude on your secrets.'

With her hand on the door, Fanny Mere closed it again, and came back.

'I am not so ungrateful,' she said, 'as to have any secrets from You. It's hard to confess what may lower me in your good opinion, but it must be done. I have deceived your ladyship—and I am ashamed of it. I have deceived the doctor—and I glory in it. My master and Mr. Vimpany thought they were safe in speaking French while I was waiting on them. I know French as well as they do.'

Iris could hardly believe what she heard.

'Do you really mean what you say?' she asked.

'There's that much good in me,' Fanny replied; 'I always mean what I say.'

'Why did you deceive me? Why have you been acting the part of an ignorant woman?'

'The deceit has been useful in your service,' the obstinate maid declared. 'Perhaps it may be useful again.'

'Was that what you were thinking of,' Iris said, 'when you allowed me to translate English into French for you, and never told me the truth?'

'At any rate, I will tell you the truth, now. No: I was not thinking of you, when you wrote my errands for me in French—I was thinking again of some advice that was once given to me.'

'Was it advice given by a friend?'

'Given by a man, my lady, who was the worst enemy I have ever had.'

Her considerate mistress understood the allusion, and forbade her to distress herself by saying more. But, Fanny felt that atonement, as well as explanation, was due to her benefactress. Slowly, painfully, she described the person to whom she had referred. He was a Frenchman, who had been her music-master during the brief period at which she had attended a school; he had promised her marriage; he had persuaded her to elope with him. The little money that they had to live on was earned by her needle, and by his wages as accompanist at a music-hall. While she was still able to attract him, and to hope for the performance of his promise, he amused himself by teaching her his own language. When he deserted her, his letter of farewell contained, among other things, the advice to which she had alluded.

'In your station of life,' this man had written, 'knowledge of French is still a rare accomplishment. Keep your knowledge to yourself. English people of rank have a way of talking French to each other, when they don't wish to be understood by their inferiors. In the course of your career, you may surprise secrets which will prove to be a little fortune, if you play your cards properly. Anyhow, it is the only fortune I have to leave to you.' Such had been the villain's parting gift to the woman whom he had betrayed.

She had hated him too bitterly to be depraved by his advice.

On the contrary, when the kindness of a friend (now no longer in England) had helped her to obtain her first employment as a domestic servant, she had thought it might be to her interest to mention that she could read, write, and speak French. The result proved to be not only a disappointment but a warning

to her for the future. Such an accomplishment as a knowledge of a foreign lauguage possessed by an Englishwoman, in her humble rank of life, was considered by her mistress to justify suspicion. Questions were asked, which it was impossible for her to answer truthfully. Small scandal drew its own conclusions—her life with the other servants became unendurable—she left her situation.

From that time, until the happy day when she met with Iris, concealment of her knowledge of French became a proceeding forced on her by her own poor interests. Her present mistress would undoubtedly have been taken into her confidence, if the opportunity had offered itself. But Iris had never encouraged her to speak of the one darkest scene in her life; and, for that reason, she had kept her own counsel until the date of her mistress's marriage. Distrusting the husband, and the husband's confidential friend—for

were they not both men?—she had thought of the vile Frenchman's advice, and had resolved to give it a trial; not with the degrading motive which he had suggested, but with the vague presentiment of making a discovery of wickedness, threatening mischief under a French disguise, which might be of service to her benefactress at some future time.

'And I may still turn it to your advantage, my lady,' Fanny ventured to add, 'if you will consent to say nothing to anybody of your having a servant who has learnt French.'

Iris looked at her coldly and gravely. 'Must I remind you,' she said, 'that you are asking my help in practising a deception on my husband?'

'I shall be sent away,' Fanny answered, 'if you tell my master what I have told you.'

This was indisputably true. Iris hesi-

tated. In her present situation, the maid was the one friend on whom she could rely. Before her marriage, she would have recoiled from availing herself, under any circumstances, of such services as Fanny's reckless gratitude had offered to her. But the moral atmosphere in which she was living had begun, as Mrs. Vimpany had foreseen, to exert its baneful influence. The mistress descended to bargaining with the servant.

'Deceive the doctor,' she said, 'and I will remember that it may be for my good.' She stopped, and considered for a moment. Her noble nature rallied its forces, and prompted her next words: 'But respect your master, if you wish me to keep your secret. I forbid you to listen to what my lord may say, when he speaks with Mr. Vimpany to-morrow.'

'I have already told your ladyship that I shall have no chance of listening to what they say to each other, out of doors,' Fanny

rejoined. 'But I can watch the doctor, at any rate. We don't know what he may not do when he is left by himself, while my master is at the meeting. I want to try if I can follow that rogue through the streets, without his finding me out. Please to send me on an errand to Paris to-morrow.'

'You will be running a terrible risk,' her mistress reminded her, 'if Mr. Vimpany discovers you.'

'I'll take my chance of that,' was the reckless reply. Iris consented.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOSPITAL

ON the next morning Lord Harry left the cottage, accompanied by the doctor.

After a long absence, he returned alone. His wife's worst apprehensions, roused by what Fanny had told her, were more than justified, by the change

which she now perceived in him. His eyes were bloodshot, his face was haggard, his movements were feeble and slow. He looked like a man exhausted by some internal conflict, which had vibrated between the extremes of anger and alarm. 'I'm tired to death,' he said; 'get me a glass of wine.'

She waited on him with eager obedience, and watched anxiously for the reviving effect of the stimulant.

The little irritabilities which degrade humanity only prolong their mischievous existence, while the surface of life stagnates in calm. Their annihilation follows when strong emotion stirs in the depths, and raises the storm. The estrangement of the day before passed as completely from the minds of the husband and wife—both strongly agitated—as if it had never existed. All-mastering fear was busy at their hearts; fear, in the woman, of the unknown temptation

which had tried the man; fear, in the man, of the tell-tale disturbance in him, which might excite the woman's suspicion. Without venturing to look at him, Iris said: 'I am afraid you have heard bad news?' Without venturing to look at her, Lord Harry answered: 'Yes, at the newspaper office.' She knew that he was deceiving her; and he felt that she knew it. For awhile, they were both silent.

From time to time, she anxiously stole a look at him.

His mind remained absorbed in thought. There they were, in the same room—seated near each other; united by the most intimate of human relationships—and yet how far, how cruelly far, apart! The slowest of all laggard minutes, which are reckoned by suspense, followed each other tardily and more tardily, before there appeared the first sign of a change. He lifted his drooping head.

Sadly, longingly, he looked at her. The unerring instinct of true love encouraged his wife to speak to him.

'I wish I could relieve your anxieties,' she said simply. 'Is there nothing I can do to help you?'

'Come here, Iris.'

She rose and approached him. In the past days of the honeymoon and its sweet familiarities, he had sometimes taken her on his knee. He took her on his knee now, and put his arm round her. 'Kiss me,' he said.

With all her heart she kissed him. He sighed heavily; his eyes rested on her with a trustful appealing look which she had never observed in them before.

'Why do you hesitate to confide in me?' she asked. 'Dear Harry, do you think I don't see that something troubles you?'

'Yes,' he said, 'there is something that I regret.'

'What is it?'

'Iris,' he answered, 'I am sorry I asked Vimpany to come back to us.'

At that unexpected confession, a bright flush of joy and pride overspread his wife's face. Again, the unerring instinct of love guided her to discovery of the truth. The opinion of his wicked friend must have been accidentally justified at the secret interview of that day, by the friend himself! In tempting her husband, Vimpany had said something which must have shocked and offended him. The result, as she could hardly doubt, had been the restoration of her domestic influence to its helpful freedom of control—whether for the time only it was not in her nature, at that moment of happiness, to inquire. 'After what you have just told me,' she ventured to say, 'I may own that I am glad to see you come home, alone.'

In that indirect manner, she confessed the

hope that friendly intercourse between the two men had come to an end. His reply disappointed her.

'Vimpany only remains in Paris,' he said, 'to present a letter of introduction. He will follow me home.'

'Soon?' she asked, piteously.

'In time for dinner, I suppose.' She was still sitting on his knee. His arm pressed her gently when he said his next words. 'I hope you will dine with us to-day, Iris?'

'Yes—if you wish it.'

'I wish it very much. Something in me recoils from being alone with Vimpany. Besides, a dinner at home without you is no dinner at all.'

She thanked him for that little compliment by a look. At the same time, her grateful sense of her husband's kindness was embittered by the prospect of the doctor's

return. 'Is he likely to dine with us often, now?' she was bold enough to say.

'I hope not.'

Perhaps he was conscious that he might have made a more positive reply. He certainly took refuge in another subject—more agreeable to himself.

'My dear, you have expressed the wish to relieve my anxieties,' he said; 'and you can help me, I think, in that way. I have a letter to write—of some importance, Iris, to your interests as well as to mine—which must go to Ireland by to-day's post. You shall read it, and say if you approve of what I have done. Don't let me be disturbed. This letter, I can tell you, will make a hard demand on my poor brains—I must go and write in my own room.'

Left alone with the thoughts that now crowded on her mind, Iris found her attention claimed once more by passing events. Fanny

Mere arrived, to report herself on her return from Paris.

She had so managed her departure from Passy as to precede Lord Harry and Mr. Vimpany, and to watch for their arrival in Paris by a later train. They had driven from the railway to the newspaper office—with the maid in attendance on them in another cab. When they separated, the doctor proceeded on foot to the Luxembourg Gardens. Wearing a plain black dress, and protected from close observation by her veil, Fanny followed him, cautiously keeping at a sufficient distance, now on one side of the street, and now on the other. When my lord joined his friend, she just held them in view, and no more, as they walked up and down in the barest and loneliest part of the Gardens that they could find. Their talk having come to an end they parted. Her master was the first who came out into the street; walking at a great rate, and look-

ing most desperately upset. Mr. Vimpany next appeared, sauntering along with his hands in his pockets, grinning as if his own villainous thoughts were thoroughly amusing him. Fanny was now more careful than ever not to lose sight of the doctor. The course which he pursued led them to the famous hospital, called the Hôtel Dieu.

At the entrance she saw him take a letter out of his pocket, and give it to the porter. Soon afterwards, a person appeared who greeted him politely, and conducted him into the building. For more than an hour, Fanny waited to see Mr. Vimpany come out again, and waited in vain. What could he possibly want in a French hospital? And why had he remained in that foreign institution for so long a time? Baffled by these mysteries, and weary after much walking, Fanny made the best of her way home, and consulted her mistress.

Even if Iris had been capable of enlighten-

ing her, the opportunity was wanting. Lord Harry entered the room, with the letter which he had just written open in his hand. As a matter of course the maid retired.

CHAPTER XL

DIRE NECESSITY

THE Irish lord had a word to say to his wife, before he submitted to her the letter which he had just written.

He had been summoned to a meeting of proprietors at the office of the newspaper, convened to settle the terms of a new subscription rendered necessary by unforeseen expenses incurred in the interests of the speculation. The vote that followed, after careful preliminary consultation, authorised a claim on the purses of subscribing proprietors, which sadly reduced the sum obtained by Lord Harry's promissory note. Nor was this in-

convenience the only trial of endurance to which the Irish lord was compelled to submit. The hope which he had entertained of assistance from the profits of the new journal, when repayment of the loan that he had raised became due, was now plainly revealed as a delusion. Ruin stared him in the face, unless he could command the means of waiting for the pecuniary success of the newspaper, during an interval variously estimated at six months, or even at a year to come.

'Our case is desperate enough,' he said, 'to call for a desperate remedy. Keep up your spirits, Iris—I have written to my brother.'

Iris looked at him in dismay.

'Surely,' she said, 'you once told me you had written to your brother, and he answered you in the cruellest manner through his lawyers.'

'Quite true, my dear. But, this time,

there is one circumstance in our favour—my brother is going to be married. The lady is said to be an heiress; a charming creature, admired and beloved wherever she goes. There must surely be something to soften the hardest heart in that happy prospect. Read what I have written, and tell me what you think of it.'

The opinion of the devoted wife encouraged the desperate husband: the letter was despatched by the post of that day.

If boisterous good spirits can make a man agreeable at the dinner-table, then indeed Mr. Vimpany, on his return to the cottage, played the part of a welcome guest. He was inexhaustible in gallant attentions to his friend's wife; he told his most amusing stories in his happiest way; he gaily drank his host's fine white Burgundy; and praised with thorough knowledge of the subject the succulent French dishes; he tried Lord Harry with talk on

politics, talk on sport, and (wonderful to relate in these days) talk on literature. The preoccupied Irishman was equally inaccessible on all three subjects. When the dessert was placed on the table—still bent on making himself agreeable to Lady Harry—Mr. Vimpany led the conversation to the subject of floriculture. In the interests of her ladyship's pretty little garden, he advocated a complete change in the system of cultivation, and justified his revolutionary views by misquoting the published work of a great authority on gardening with such polite obstinacy that Iris (eager to confute him) went away to fetch the book. The moment he had entrapped her into leaving the room, the doctor turned to Lord Harry with a sudden change to the imperative mood in look and manner.

'What have you been about,' he asked, 'since we had that talk in the Gardens today? Have you looked at your empty purse,

and are you wise enough to take my way of filling it?'

'As long as there's a ghost of a chance left to me,' Lord Harry replied, 'I'll take any way of filling my purse but yours.'

'Does that mean you have found a way?'

'Do me a favour, Vimpany. Defer all questions till the end of the week.'

'And then I shall have your answer?'

'Without fail, I promise it. Hush!'

Iris returned to the dining-room with her book; and polite Mr. Vimpany owned in the readiest manner that he had been mistaken.

The remaining days of the week followed each other wearily. During the interval, Lord Harry's friend carefully preserved the character of a model guest—he gave as little trouble as possible. Every morning after breakfast the doctor went away by the train, every morning (with similar regularity) he was followed by the resolute Fanny Mere.

Pursuing his way through widely different quarters of Paris he invariably stopped at a public building, invariably presented a letter at the door, and was invariably asked to walk in. Inquiries, patiently persisted in by the English maid, led in each case to the same result. The different public buildings were devoted to the same benevolent purpose. Like the Hôtel Dieu, they were all hospitals; and Mr. Vimpany's object in visiting them remained as profound a mystery as ever.

Early on the last morning of the week the answer from Lord Harry's brother arrived. Hearing of it, Iris ran eagerly into her husband's room. The letter was already scattered in fragments on the floor. What the tone of the Earl's inhuman answer had been in the past time, that it was again now.

Iris put her arms round her husband's neck. 'Oh, my poor love, what is to be done?'

He answered in one reckless word: 'Nothing!'

'Is there nobody else who can help us?' she asked.

'Ah, well, darling, there's perhaps one other person still left.'

'Who is the person?'

'Who should it be but your own dear self?'

She looked at him in undisguised bewilderment: 'Only tell me, Harry, what I can do?'

'Write to Mountjoy, and ask him to lend me the money.'

He said it. In those shameless words, he said it. She, who had sacrificed Mountjoy to the man whom she had married, was now asked by that man to use Mountjoy's devotion to her, as a means of paying his debts! Iris drew back from him with a cry of disgust.

'You refuse?' he said.

'Do you insult me by doubting it?' she answered.

He rang the bell furiously, and dashed out of the room. She heard him, on the stairs, ask where Mr. Vimpany was. The servant replied: 'In the garden, my lord.'

Smoking a cigar luxuriously in the fine morning air, the doctor saw his excitable Irish friend hastening out to meet him.

'Don't hurry,' he said, in full possession of his impudent good-humour; 'and don't lose your temper. Will you take my way out of your difficulties, or will you not? Which is it—Yes or No?'

'You infernal scoundrel—Yes!'

'My dear lord, I congratulate you.'

'On what, sir?'

'On being as great a scoundrel as I am.'

CHAPTER XLI

THE MAN IS FOUND

THE unworthy scheme, by means of which Lord Harry had proposed to extricate himself from his pecuniary responsibilities, had led to serious consequences. It had produced a state of

deliberate estrangement between man and wife.

Iris secluded herself in her own room. Her husband passed the hours of every day away from the cottage; sometimes in the company of the doctor, sometimes among his friends in Paris. His wife suffered acutely under the self-imposed state of separation, to which wounded pride and keenly-felt resentment compelled her to submit. No friend was near her, in whose compassionate advice she might have taken refuge. Not even the sympathy of her maid was offered to the lonely wife.

With the welfare of Iris as her one end in view, Fanny Mere honestly believed that it would be better and safer for Lady Harry if she and her husband finally decided on living separate lives. The longer my lord persisted in keeping the doctor with him as his guest, the more perilously he was associated with a

merciless wretch, who would be capable of plotting the ruin of anyone—man or woman, high person or low person—who might happen to be an obstacle in his way. So far as a person in her situation could venture on taking the liberty, the maid did her best to widen the breach between her master and her mistress.

While Fanny was making the attempt to influence Lady Harry, and only producing irritation as the result, Vimpany was exerting stronger powers of persuasion in the effort to prejudice the Irish lord against any proposal for reconciliation which might reach him through his wife.

'I find an unforgiving temper in your charming lady,' the doctor declared. 'It doesn't show itself on the surface, my dear fellow, but there it is. Take a wise advantage of circumstances—say you will raise no inconvenient objections, if she wants a separa-

tion by mutual consent. Now don't misunderstand me. I only recommend the sort of separation which will suit our convenience. You know as well as I do that you can whistle your wife back again——'

Mr. Vimpany's friend was rude enough to interrupt him there.

'I call that a coarse way of putting it,' Lord Harry interposed.

'Put it how you like for yourself,' the doctor rejoined. 'Lady Harry may be persuaded to come back to you, when we want her for our grand project. In the meantime (for I am always a considerate man where women are concerned) we act delicately towards my lady, in sparing her the discovery of—what shall I call our coming enterprise? —venturesome villainy, which might ruin you in your wife's estimation. Do you see our situation now, as it really is? Very well.

Pass the bottle, and drop the subject for the present.'

The next morning brought with it an event, which demolished the doctor's ingenious arrangement for the dismissal of Iris from the scene of action. Lord and Lady Harry encountered each other accidentally on the stairs.

Distrusting herself if she ventured to look at him, Iris turned her eyes away from her husband. He misinterpreted the action as an expression of contempt. Anger at once inclined him to follow Mr. Vimpany's advice.

He opened the door of the dining-room, empty at that moment, and told Iris that he wished to speak with her. What his villainous friend had suggested that he should say on the subject of a separation, he now repeated with a repellent firmness which he was far from really feeling. The acting was

bad, but the effect was produced. For the first time, his wife spoke to him.

'Do you really mean it?' she asked.

The tone in which she said those words, sadly and regretfully telling its tale of uncontrollable surprise; the tender remembrance of past happy days in her eyes; the quivering pain, expressive of wounded love, that parted her lips in the effort to breathe freely, touched his heart, try as he might in the wretched pride of the moment to conceal it. He was silent.

'If you are weary of our married life,' she continued, 'say so, and let us part. I will go away, without entreaties and without reproaches. Whatever pain I may feel, *you* shall not see it!' A passing flush crossed her face, and left it pale again. She trembled under the consciousness of returning love—the blind love that had so cruelly misled her!

At a moment when she most needed firmness, her heart was sinking; she resisted, struggled, recovered herself. Quietly, and even firmly, she claimed his decision. 'Does your silence mean,' she asked, 'that you wish me to leave you?'

No man who had loved her as tenderly as her husband had loved her, could have resisted that touching self-control. He answered his wife without uttering a word—he held out his arms to her. The fatal reconciliation was accomplished in silence.

At dinner on that day Mr. Vimpany's bold eyes saw a new sight, and Mr. Vimpany's rascally lips indulged in an impudent smile. My lady appeared again in her place at the dinner-table. At the customary time, the two men were left alone over their wine. The reckless Irish lord, rejoicing in the recovery of his wife's tender regard, drank freely. Understanding and despising him, the doctor's

devilish gaiety indulged in facetious reminiscences of his own married life.

'If I could claim a sovereign,' he said, 'for every quarrel between Mrs. Vimpany and myself, I put it at a low average when I declare that I should be worth a thousand pounds. How does your lordship stand in that matter? Shall we say a dozen breaches of the marriage agreement up to the present time?'

'Say two—and no more to come!' his friend answered cheerfully.

'No more to come!' the doctor repeated. 'My experience says plenty more to come; I never saw two people less likely to submit to a peaceable married life than you and my lady. Ha! you laugh at that? It's a habit of mine to back my opinion. I'll bet you a dozen of champagne there will be a quarrel which parts you two, for good and all, before the year is out. Do you take the bet?'

'Done!' cried Lord Harry. 'I propose

my wife's good health, Vimpany, in a bumper. She shall drink confusion to all false prophets in the first glass of your champagne!'

The post of the next morning brought with it two letters.

One of them bore the postmark of London, and was addressed to Lady Harry Norland. It was written by Mrs. Vimpany, and it contained a few lines added by Hugh Mountjoy. 'My strength is slow in returning to me' (he wrote); 'but my kind and devoted nurse says that all danger of infection is at an end. You may write again to your old friend if Lord Harry sees no objection, as harmlessly as in the happy past time. My weak hand begins to tremble already. How glad I shall be to hear from you, it is, happily for me, quite needless to add.'

In her delight at receiving this good news Iris impulsively assumed that her husband would give it a kindly welcome on his side;

she insisted on reading the letter to him. He said coldly, 'I am glad to hear of Mr. Mountjoy's recovery'—and took up the newspaper. Was this unworthy jealousy still strong enough to master him, even at that moment? His wife had forgotten it. Why had he not forgotten it too?

On the same day Iris replied to Hugh, with the confidence and affection of the bygone time before her marriage. After closing and addressing the envelope, she found that her small store of postage stamps was exhausted, and sent for her maid. Mr. Vimpany happened to pass the open door of her room, while she was asking for a stamp; he heard Fanny say that she was not able to accommodate her mistress. 'Allow me to make myself useful,' the polite doctor suggested. He produced a stamp, and fixed it himself on the envelope. When he had proceeded on his way downstairs, Fanny's distrust of him

insisted on expressing itself. 'He wanted to find out what person you have written to,' she said. 'Let me make your letter safe in the post.' In five minutes more it was in the box at the office.

While these trifling events were in course of progress, Mr. Vimpany had gone into the garden to read the second of the two letters, delivered that morning, addressed to himself. On her return from the post-office, Fanny had opportunities of observing him while she was in the greenhouse, trying to revive the perishing flowers—neglected in the past days of domestic trouble.

Noticing her, after he had read his letter over for the second time, Mr. Vimpany sent the maid into the cottage to say that he wished to speak with her master. Lord Harry joined him in the garden—looked at the letter—and, handing it back, turned away. The doctor followed him, and said something which seemed

to be received with objection. Mr. Vimpany persisted nevertheless, and apparently carried his point. The two gentlemen consulted the railway time-table, and hurried away together, to catch the train to Paris.

Fanny Mere returned to the conservatory, and absently resumed her employment among the flowers. On what evil errand had the doctor left the cottage? And why on this occasion, had he taken the master with him?

The time had been when Fanny might have tried to set these questions at rest by boldly following the two gentlemen to Paris; trusting to her veil, to her luck, and to the choice of a separate carriage in the train, to escape notice. But, although her ill-judged interference with the domestic affairs of Lady Harry had been forgiven, she had not been received again into favour unreservedly. Conditions were imposed, which forbade her

to express any opinion on her master's conduct, and which imperatively ordered her to leave the protection of her mistress—if protection was really needed—in his lordship's competent hands. 'I gratefully appreciate your kind intentions,' Iris had said, with her customary tenderness of regard for the feelings of others; 'but I never wish to hear again of Mr. Vimpany, or of the strange suspicions which he seems to excite in your mind.' Still as gratefully devoted to Iris as ever, Fanny viewed the change in my lady's way of thinking as one of the deplorable results of her return to her husband, and waited resignedly for the coming time when her wise distrust of two unscrupulous men would be justified.

Condemned to inaction for the present, Lady Harry's maid walked irritably up and down the conservatory, forgetting the flowers. Through the open back door of the cottage

the cheap clock in the hall poured its harsh little volume of sound, striking the hour. 'I wonder,' she said to herself, 'if those two wicked ones have found their way to a hospital yet?' That guess happened to have hit the mark. The two wicked ones were really approaching a hospital, well known to the doctor by more previous visits than one. At the door they were met by a French physician, attached to the Institution—the writer of the letter which had reached Mr. Vimpany in the morning.

This gentleman led the way to the official department of the hospital, and introduced the two foreigners to the French authorities assembled for the transaction of business.

As a medical man, Mr. Vimpany's claims to general respect and confidence were carefully presented. He was a member of the English College of Surgeons; he was the friend as well as the colleague of the famous

President of that College, who had introduced him to the chief surgeon of the Hôtel Dieu. Other introductions to illustrious medical persons in Paris had naturally followed. Presented under these advantages, Mr. Vimpany announced his discovery of a new system of treatment in diseases of the lungs. Having received his medical education in Paris, he had felt bound in gratitude to place himself under the protection of 'the princes of science,' resident in the brilliant capital of France. In that hospital, after much fruitless investigation in similar institutions, he had found a patient suffering from the form of lung disease, which offered to him the opportunity that he wanted. It was impossible that he could do justice to his new system, unless the circumstances were especially favourable. Air more pure than the air of a great city, and bedroom accommodation not shared by other sick persons, were among the conditions

absolutely necessary to the success of the experiment. These, and other advantages, were freely offered to him by his noble friend, who would enter into any explanations which the authorities then present might think it necessary to demand.

The explanations having been offered and approved, there was a general move to the bed occupied by the invalid who was an object of professional interest to the English doctor.

The patient's name was Oxbye. He was a native of Denmark, and had followed in his own country the vocation of a schoolmaster. His knowledge of the English language and the French had offered him the opportunity of migrating to Paris, where he had obtained employment as translator and copyist. Earning his bread, poorly enough in this way, he had been prostrated by the malady which had obliged him to take refuge in the hos-

pital. The French physician, under whose medical care he had been placed, having announced that he had communicated his notes enclosed in a letter to his English colleague, and having frankly acknowledged that the result of the treatment had not as yet sufficiently justified expectation, the officers of the institution spoke next. The Dane was informed of the nature of Mr. Vimpany's interest in him, and of the hospitable assistance offered by Mr. Vimpany's benevolent friend; and the question was then put, whether he preferred to remain where he was or whether he desired to be removed under the conditions which had been just stated?

Tempted by the prospect of a change, which offered to him a bed-chamber of his own in the house of a person of distinction—with a garden to walk about in, and flowers to gladden his eyes, when he got better—

Oxbye eagerly adopted the alternative of leaving the hospital. 'Pray let me go,' the poor fellow said; 'I am sure I shall be the better for it.' Without opposing this decision, the responsible directors reminded him that it had been adopted on impulse, and decided that it was their duty to give him a little time for consideration.

In the meanwhile, some of the gentlemen assembled at the bedside, looking at Oxbye and then looking at Lord Harry, had observed a certain accidental likeness between the patient and 'Milord, the philanthropist,' who was willing to receive him. The restraints of politeness had only permitted them to speak of this curious discovery among themselves. At the later time, however, when the gentlemen had taken leave of each other, Mr. Vimpany—finding himself alone with Lord Harry—had no hesitation in introducing the subject, on which delicacy

had prevented the Frenchmen from entering.

'Did you look at the Dane?' he began abruptly.

'Of course I did!'

'And you noticed the likeness?'

'Not I!'

The doctor's uproarious laughter startled the people who were walking near them in the street. 'Here's another proof,' he burst out, 'of the true saying that no man knows himself. You don't deny the likeness, I suppose?'

'Do you yourself see it?' Lord Harry asked.

Vimpany answered that question scornfully: 'Is it likely that I should have submitted to all the trouble I have taken to get possession of that man, if I had not seen a likeness between his face and yours?'

The Irish lord said no more. When his friend asked why he was silent, he gave his reason sharply enough: 'I don't like the subject.'

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